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The Golden Bough*

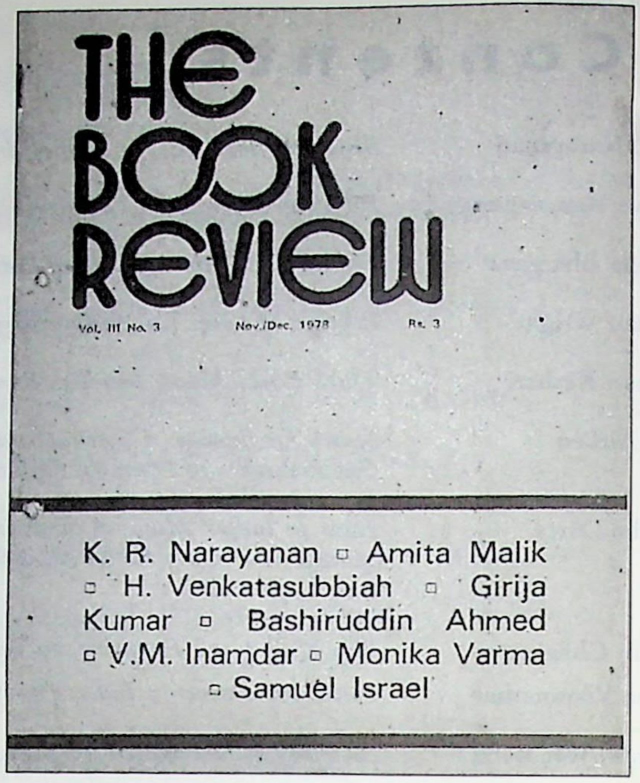
K.R. Narayanan

BLOOD AND FLOWERS: THE PATH OF THE POET TO HUU
Selected poems of To Huu
Interview with To Huu
and presentation by Mireille Gansel
Translation by Elizabeth Hodgkin and Mary Jameson
Introduction by the poet Xuan Dieu
Foreign Languages Publishing House, Hanoi, 1978, pp. 175, price not mentioned.

"But life itself is poetry; it is the most living poetry, and with us there are no clear limits between life and poetry." So says To Huu, the poet of modern Vietnam, in one of the interviews with which this slender volume of selections from his poetry are interspersed—interviews in which he speaks about his life, political struggles and poetic experiences in prose that is as lyrical and sensitive as his poetry. The poetry of To Huu is not just a reflection of life or merely "emotions recollected in tranquility" in the traditional manner, but something that flows with an easy directness and immediacy from life itself, like the sap of a tree bursting into tender leaves or like blood blossoming into flowers of the flesh. This is indeed a rare collection of poems in English translation coming from that glorious, tortured land of Vietnam, and as the translators say contains that "blend of militancy and tenderness" so typical of the Vietnamese.

Of Vietnam To Huu writes "No, our people have known a terrible grievous fate all through their long history. What will save them most of all is their love of mankind, their humanity. We have never known any long period of tranquility. No, there have always been invasions from the north, south, sometimes even the west. Ours is a tragic history… And then there have always been floods and typhoons. At every period this made the life of the people so hard; deaths, misfortunes, calamities of every kind… But it is necessary to live, survive, and for that you need a certain friendship, solidarity, comprehension, a mutual confidence; love of what is close, love of what is familiar." It is of this predicament of Vietnam that To Huu has written, not in tragic sorrowful tones or in rough proletarian rage, but with glowing divine indignation against tyranny and injustice and a melting love for the familiar things of life, for the mountains, rivers, rice-fields, potatoes, cassava, for a bird dead in the prison cage, a servant boy leaving a house with insults from his mistress raining all over him, for a nurse who has to leave her own baby uncared for in order to look after the master's child, for mothers waiting for their sons gone underground to fight for the liberation of the land.

To understand the poetry of To Huu it is necessary to know something of the life-story of the poet which has been bound up with Vietnam's struggle for independence, freedom and revolution. This story is told in the book in the form of interviews with the poet, scattered in-between his poems, casting light on the background and meaning of the poems. To Huu is today not only a well-known poet but an alternate Member of the Politbureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam. Born in 1920 he joined the Communist Party in 1938 at the age of eighteen. He was arrested in 1939 and until 1942 when he managed to escape, he spent his days in various prisons. In the jails of Vietnam he did not get the books, papers and pens which a Gandhi or Nehru got in British Indian jails. He composed poems in his mind most of which he forgot. He wrote poems on prison walls which disappeared through white-washing. The poems which survived from those early days



were written on green leaves. To Huu was often put in special cells and was not allowed to go out to work like most of his other friends in jail. Some of these friends brought to him from outside banana and other leaves on which he scribbled poems with pins. They were taken out by his comrades who went to work and from there they went to mass organizations in the country. "Those were my first publications", he says, "my first book; a bough, a whole bough, little but with lots of leaves". One can truly say, as another Vietnamese poet—Xuan Dieu has said in the introduction to this book, that "To Huu's poetry came to us by the way of the wind, carried to us by the breath of men", from prisons and the underground, tearing apart the meshes of legality.

These prison poems are marked by tender and almost sensuous love for his country, for life in general and for humanity. In the poem 'The State of a Prisoner's soul' he says: "I listen passionately to the noises of life—which is flowing outside with an immense happiness". The twittering of birds, the swift rustling of night bats, the tinkle of bells of a horse, the clatter of passing clogs on the road. All these: "Suddenly for a brief moment make me forget how sad life is—There outside … how many imprisoned destinies are crushed in depths of fathomless despair".

In my 'My Bird' To Huu sings of the little sparrow he kept in his cell, which he fed with grain, hoping that "it would sweeten my sad loneliness" but which died one day in prison. With a pathos reminiscent of Wordsworth or Robert Burns he writes:

Why even for an instant
Break the song of a little bird?
Why not send him back to the wind and cloud
To make himself drunk on sky and light?

At one place To Huu says: "I am in love with my country, and I talk to it as a lover talks to a woman". In "Nostalgia for the Countryside" he expresses his love for the countryside of Vietnam with a mixture of joy and sadness, a lyricism that is romantic touched with the simple down-to-earth realism of the revolutionary—

Where is the wind from the dunes bearing the thousand savours of earth?
Where are the cool groves of bamboos breathing their tranquil joy?
Where is the fresh young rice with its emerald shoots?
Where are the fields of sweet potatoes and cassava?...
… Where are the backs bent over the furrows?
Delirious savour of the hope-filled ooze!
Where are the hands

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*Reprinted from the *The Book Review* (Vol. III No. 3, November/December 1978)

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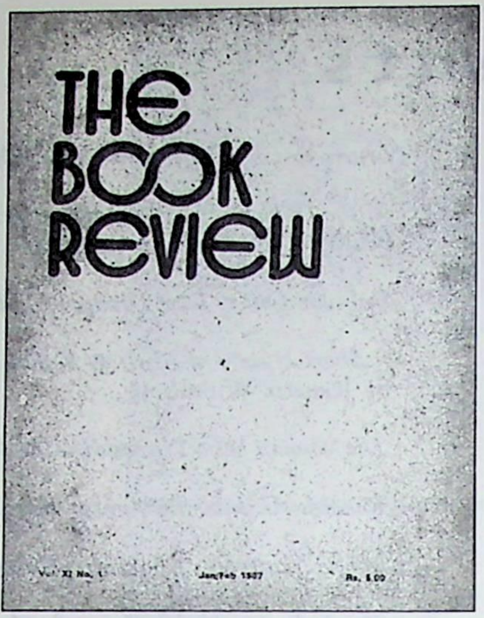
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Age Cannot Wither*

K.R. Narayanan

LETTERS TO CHIEF MINISTERS—VOLS. I&II (1947-49 & 1950-52)
General Editor: G. Parthasarathy
Oxford University Press, 1985 & 1986, Rs. 150.00 each.



Jawaharlal Nehru was, throughout his life, a teacher and an educator to others as well as to himself. From jail he wrote the letters to his daughter giving to Indira and the younger generation in India glimpses of world history. In the Indian National Congress he was the preacher of new ideas—of socialism, secularism and internationalism. In Parliament he often functioned as a school master to the nation. Even on world platforms, while pursuing the foreign policy of India, he was also preaching the gospel of peaceful coexistence and international cooperation. In the *Letters to Chief Ministers* Nehru, as the Prime Minister of India, was not only informing the chief ministers of events and policies but expounding and analyzing their meaning and significance in a continuous, imperceptible, effortless educational exercise.

All this would have been somewhat pedantic and tiresome had it not been charged with so much history and had not Nehru himself been almost audibly thinking and learning in the process. One can sense in these letters the gropings of a restless spirit and the ticking of an inquisitive mind. There is also a sense of intimacy with the author that is being produced, a sort of impersonal intimacy, in being allowed to share his thoughts, feelings, doubts and hopes for the nation that he was leading in difficult and tempestuous circumstances. The letters span the entire prime ministership of Nehru from 1947 to 1964 of which the two volumes under review cover the period upto 1952.

In many ways, Nehru's letters to the chief ministers are unique. Many statesmen have written diaries, personal and political. But hardly anyone has recorded in this regular, serious and simple manner, the events of a long and crowded political era. Though written to the chief ministers of the states, they were circulated to all the central ministers as well as to embassies abroad. In the embassies the arrival of copies of Nehru's fortnightly letters were eagerly looked forward to and often ambassadors read out whole letters to their diplomatic staff at morning meetings. Indeed through these letters India's representatives were being informed of domestic and foreign policies regularly and clearly with insights into the mind of the policy-maker himself. In these letters Nehru emerges as a subtle educator who was trying to infuse the minds of the top echelons of Government with his ideas, values and methods of approach to national and international problems. The problems covered in these letters are vast, varied and complex. In this review one can deal only with a few of them.

The aftermath of Partition, relations with Pakistan, the Kashmir issue and the problems of India's unity and stability had exercised Nehru considerably in those early days of independence. How to deal with the minorities was a question uppermost in his mind. In his very first letter, referring to the charge of appeasement of the Muslims he wrote: "We have a Muslim minority who are so large in number that they cannot, even if they want to, go anywhere else. They have got to live in India. That is a basic fact about which there can be no argument. Whatever the provocation from Pakistan and whatever the indignities and horrors inflicted on non-Muslims there, we have got to deal with this minority in a civilized manner. We must give them security and the rights of citizens in a democratic state. If we fail to do so, we shall have a festering sore which will eventually poison the whole body politic and probably destroy it."

The treatment of minorities and the problem of communalism had preoccupied Nehru's thinking throughout his career as prime minister. He believed that communalism was a greater threat to Indian unity and stability than communism. His interpretation of communalism was not limited, but covered casteism, tribalism and such other narrow, obscurantist, divisive group fanaticisms which acted as fissiparous forces in society. He knew that all these forces were interconnected , feeding upon and fuelling one another, posing threats to the integrity and the progress of the nation. That is how he came to interpret secularism, not merely in relation to religious communalism but as a modern, scientific approach transcending a narrow grooves of castes, tribes, regions, languages, etc., which have historically fragmented Indian society vertically as well as horizontally. It is for this larger transformation of society and of the thinking of the people that Nehru bent his efforts as prime minister. In spite of all his impassioned impatience with the system, he adopted the indirect and somewhat gradualist but all-pervasive method of transformation as he knew well that an ancient and complex society like that of India was not amenable to rapid root and branch changes. Such a method needed for its success consistent, uninterrupted efforts on the part of the government at the centre and the states as well as by the political parties, social organizations and the people. It involved besides industrialization and economic development, social reforms and socio-economic changes on a big scale. The weak and halting nature of such reforms and changes gave room for some of the old and reactionary forces to assert themselves together with the process of development and modernization itself.

It is significant that Nehru had considered that communalism was the main threat to Indian unity and Indian political system, and that since Muslim communalism had weakened after Partition the danger was that of Hindu communalism raising its head. By Hindu he meant the forces on the extremist fringe of Hindu society like the RSS which was trying to divert the secular nationalism of the vast majority of Hindus along fundamentalist and religious channels. It was for this reason that he took an uncompromising line towards Hindu extremism which he feared would fuel Muslim communalism and in a vicious chain reaction give rise to communal tensions and conflicts in the country. However, the pursuit of secular policies, the functioning of democracy and the process of national planning since independence have had the effect of consolidating Indian unity as was demonstrated in three wars with Pakistan. But communal, regional and linguistic forces still raise their fissiparous heads from time to time together with fundamentalism and extremism and hence the point that Nehru had been making repeatedly in these letters contain much validity even today.

These two volumes contain a great deal of material that reveals Nehru's views, thinking and analysis on Indo-Pakistan relations and the Kashmir question. They are important not so much because of anything startlingly new that is revealed, but because they were part of the confidential exchanges between the Prime Minister and the Chief Ministers and not written for public consumption. Contrary to the impressions in

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Battle on Globalization

Ashwini Deshpande

IN DEFENSE OF GLOBALIZATION
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Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2004, pp. xi + 308, Rs. 445.00

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Tulika Books (in association with School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University), New Delhi, 2004, pp. xi + 173, Rs. 295.00

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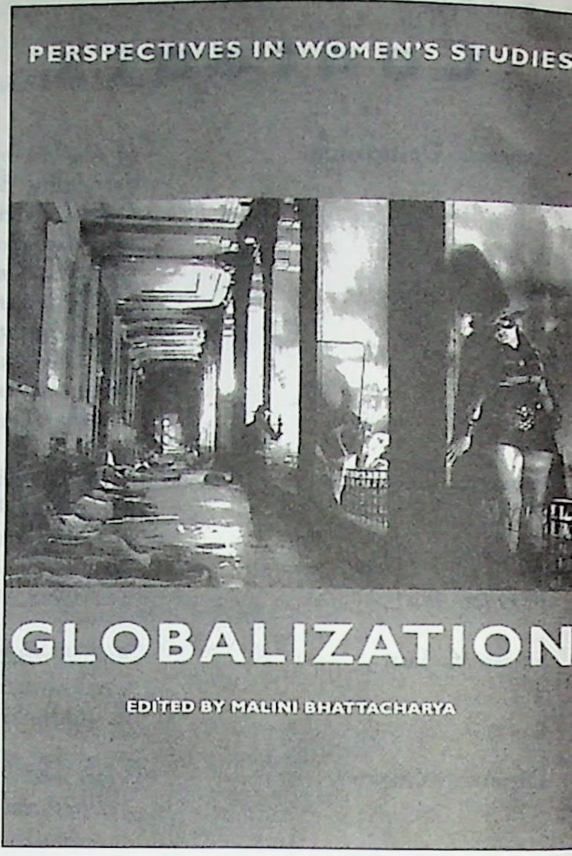
THE GEOPOLITICS OF GLOBALISATION: THE CONSEQUENCES FOR DEVELOPMENT
By Baldev Raj Nayar
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2005, pp. xii + 301, Rs. 595.00

INDIA IN THE AGE OF GLOBALISATION: CONTEMPORARY DISCOURSES AND TEXTS
Edited by Suman Gupta, Tapan Basu and Subarno Chatterji
Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, 2003, pp. xix + 416, Rs. 1000.00

GLOBALISATION AND LABOUR: THE NEW GREAT TRANSFORMATION
By Ronaldo Munck
Madhyam Books, New Delhi, 2002, pp. xiii+ 216, Rs. 250.00

Bhagwati wages a virtually lonely battle in this collection; however, his position in this set of books (that of a minority) is misleading as he actually represents the mainstream opinion on globalization, one that is, by and large, endorsed by international financial institutions and the most powerful nations of the world. The title of his book is honest– he does indeed provide a consistent defence of contemporary globalization and argues that the concerns of its critics are misplaced. He differs from the mainstream position only in one respect when he questions the liberalization of the capital account and suggests that financial liberalization was an important ingredient in explaining the East Asian crisis and also suggests that the reason Malaysia was able to withstand the crisis was because it did retain capital controls.

Globalisation and Labour: Bhagwati dismisses all arguments that suggest that MNC dominated production, integral to present-day globalization, exploits labour any way– either by paying low wages or by the violation of labour rights or by the race to the bottom induced by competition among developing countries to attract FDI. He believes that MNCs have an unambiguously positive (or at least non-negative) effect on the workers in that they increase employment, typically pay more than alternative occupations and do not violate labour rights any more than domestic firms. In fact, he claims that due to pressure from environmental and labour lobbies in the rich countries, there is a race to the top that the poor countries resist because it reduces their competitiveness.



If one compares the wages paid by MNCs in the South to alternative employment opportunities available in the South, then of course, Bhagwati's argument is correct. Indeed, it is nobody's case (certainly none that I am aware of) that MNCs pay *less* for alternative occupations in the South and this is not the basis on which the charge of exploitation is based. The real issue, that Bhagwati does not address, is how the wages paid in the South compare with those paid for similar occupations in the North, even after adjusting for purchasing power parity. If they were not lower in the South thus compared, why would Northern companies outsource on a scale that earns them the wrath of their own workers and often even their governments? Clearly it is cheaper for them to get the same work done in the South than in their own countries. Also, the SEZs (special economic zones) or the EPZs (export processing zones) in developing countries are special precisely because they offer special concessions, either in the form of tax concessions or in the freedom from labour laws, to MNCs. Thus, the MNCs that operate out of these regions certainly enjoy these benefits that are out of sync with similar policies in other sectors/ regions of the country. To be fair, these special zones have been established by governments of host countries, thus MNCs cannot be "blamed" for these special privileges. However, a) to claim that MNCs do not receive special privileges in the host country is not correct, and
b) cause and effect is complicated as the competition for FDI, that leads them to announce more and more concessions, among developing country governments (thus, there does exist a race to the bottom, whether we

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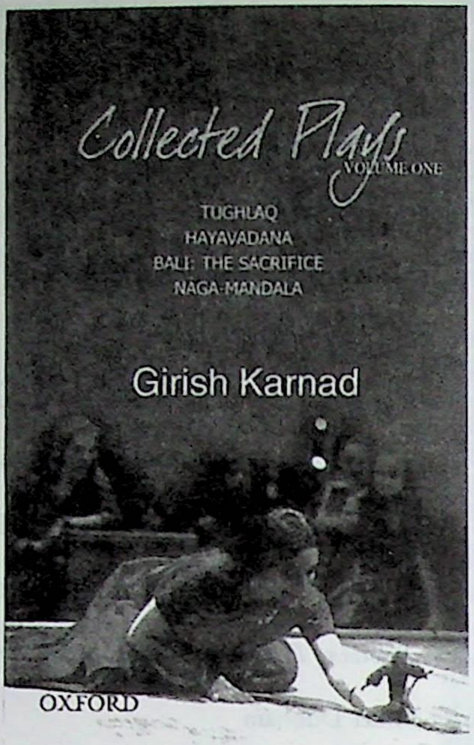
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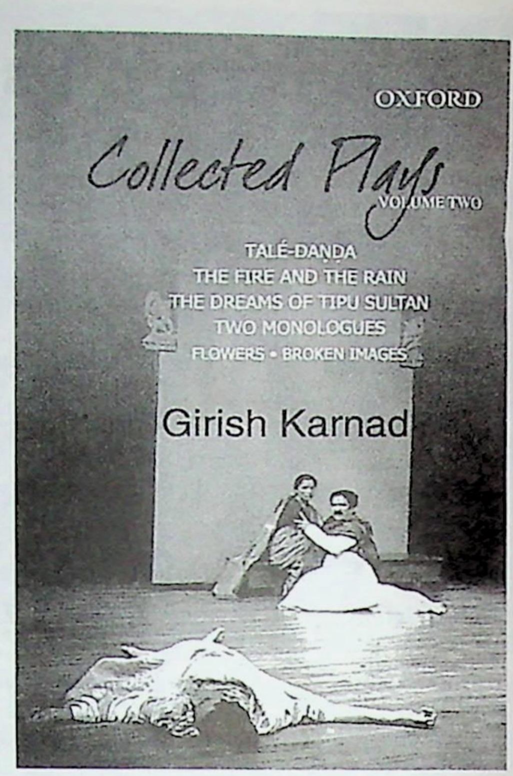
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Critiquing Karnad's Oeuvre

Ananda Lal





COLLECTED PLAYS VOL. I & II
By Girish Karnad
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2005,
pp. 319 & 301, Rs. 495.00 and 545.00 respectively.

The editor of this periodical has a wry sense of humour. She requested Girish Karnad to review the *Oxford Companion to Indian Theatre*, edited by me. Now she asks me to review Karnad's *Collected Plays*, also published by Oxford University Press. Readers will appreciate the subtle trap in which she has placed me, not unlike those we typically encounter in Karnad's drama. If I praise the set (which naturally I should), wags will nod their heads knowingly and joke that we belong to the Mutual Back-slapping Society. Therefore the only face-saving option for me is to criticize, so as to earn the tag of fairness. Yet how do I criticize an author as feted as Karnad, unanimously respected as substantial contributor to contemporary Indian theatre, on whom I myself have written articles and entries in international encyclopedias, and derived great pleasure in teaching to students?

It is virtually unthinkable, given that this anthology comprises such iconic and influential texts as *Tughlaq*, *Hayavadana*, *Naga-Mandala* (in volume one), *Tale-Danda* and *The Fire and the Rain* (in volume two). So much has been published about them, a reviewer can add precious little. Furthermore, the first volume includes the full alternate ending to *Naga-Mandala* (we may crib, of course, that we are not informed that it differs from OUP's first edition) and *Bali*, the recent reworking in English of Karnad's earlier *Hittina Hunja*. The second volume also contains *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* and two new monologues printed for the first time, *Flowers* and *Broken Images*. To top it all, Professor Aparna Bhargava Dharwadker of the University of Wisconsin introduces each volume with a lucid essay analysing the individual plays, the two essays combining to form a major 63-page overview of Karnad's oeuvre.

I cannot have any quarrel with the plays. Like the overwhelming majority of viewers and readers, I find them clever and thoughtful, always provocative and remarkably theatrical. Even the latest monologues display the characteristic Karnad (Karnadic? Karnadian?) touch, both employing his recurrent device of a sensual triangle, but switching the usual situation of one woman with two men to one man with two women. Derived from a Kannada folktale, *Flowers* features a priest who falls for a courtesan and cheats on his wife. Its high difficulty level – solo narration by the man for nearly an hour – has inhibited any performance so far, but it functions equally well as a short story. *Broken Images*, a stimulating topical piece (not strictly a monologue) on identity theft complicated by linguistic and sexual politics, reveals how a Kannada author stole her own sister's English manuscript of a novel. Despite its tough demands on technology – namely, a television screen showing the author's image talking back to her on stage – it premiered last year, directed by Karnad himself. I am dying to see it.

So where might a premeditated critique begin? Let us first see what the *Collected Plays* do not collect. Karnad still refuses to acknowledge that his debut, *Yayati* (1961), is worthy to print in English translation. This is a wrong decision born of unnecessary modesty about an early work, as I can testify that, at least in its Bengali incarnation staged by the premier group Bohurupee, *Yayati* left a strong impact. Besides, now that every other Indian student of postcolonialism must write papers on Karnad, they have the right to read it, more so since Karnad comments extensively on it. Likewise, he should have allowed *Anjumallige* (1977), rewritten in English as *Driven Snow* (2000), to appear too, permitting us a glimpse into the "lost years" between *Hayavadana* (1971) and *Naga-Mandala* (1988).

The initial ice now broken, I may take heart from Dharwadker's concluding line which, according to her, Karnad affirms: "unexamined certitudes are synonymous with death; doubt and uncertainty are the signs of life." Adopting this motto, I head into the breach.

I have some serious problems with Karnad's "In Search of a New Theatre", which forms the first appendix here and introduces OUP's previous edition of his *Three Plays*. Worse, Dharwadker follows him in ahistorically rejecting the artistic/intellectual significance of pre-Independence dramatists. Firstly, both use the word "modern" very loosely as applied to the Indian stage. The trouble lies in the fact that, despite much interdisciplinary scholarship, Indian theatre historians persist in extending the temporal boundaries of modernism by referring to Karnad's generation as modern. Consequently, most theatre people wrongly continue to believe that Indian drama came of age only after 1947, when modernism apparently kicked the sleeping giant out of bed.

To give Karnad his due, he defines the period more accurately: " 'modern Indian theatre' was started by a group of people who adopted 'cultural amnesia' as a deliberate strategy … in the second half of the nineteenth century … in Bombay, Calcutta and Madras." However, he dismisses all drama prior to Independence as "sterile", generalizing from the entertainment-oriented formulae of Parsi theatre, and stating that "there was no other urban tradition to look to". It matters little that a few pages later he retracts somewhat by admitting that "a few plays of great power were written" on realistic social and political issues in the 1930s, because he still avows triumphantly, "a hundred crowded years of urban theatre … left almost nothing to hang on to, to take off from." And then, arguing that "the most obvious starting point should have been the Sanskrit theatre", he contends that "no modern playwright has claimed, or shown in his work, any allegiance to Sanskrit sensibility."

Which "modern" does he mean here: his initial chronologically correct one, or the vague confusion of theatre historians? The point is not just a quibble on the historicity of modernity in Indian theatre; the point is that he is wrong on all counts, because of his long-time blind eye to Calcutta. From its inception in the mid-nineteenth century, Bengali amateur and professional theatre took pride in socio-political reform and dissent. If it had not been for "sterile" plays like Dinabandhu Mitra's

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Cover: Photograph of The KC 520 of 1905 vintage crosses the Kanoh viaduct, Kalka Simla Railway, Himachal Pradesh from *Our Indian Railway: Themes in India's Railway History* (Foundation Books, 2006)

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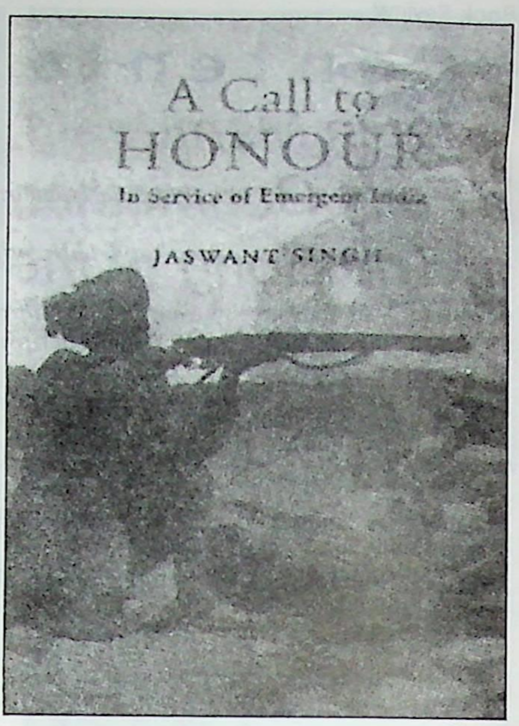
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Annotating Recent History

B.G. Verghese

A CALL TO HONOUR: IN SERVICE OF EMERGENT INDIA
By Jaswant Singh
Rupa & Co., Delhi, pp. 426, Rs. 495.00



Jaswant Singh steered the country's external relations and, for a while, defence during an eventful and turbulent period of NDA governance. It was a time of change and the BJP was in office during the transition that it partly helped to make. As a key player in office, he both shaped and reacted to developments that saw India finally emerge as a nuclear weapons state (alongside Pakistan) and a prime focus of jihadi terror and began to forge a new strategic partnership with the United States.

Most Indians have a poor sense of history, which possibly explains why so few write about it contemporaneously when their insights could aid the formulation and execution of policy from lessons learnt in the unforgiving school of experience. Fortunately, Jaswant Singh is among the exceptions and has ventured to share his thoughts and face the accountability that comes from public scrutiny. He maintained a dairy, a tricky hobby, on which he draws to capture the flavour of the moment and adorn his tale.

Many will go straight to Books II and III, which tell of Pokhran and its aftermath, including the new engagement with the United States and China, and the rise of terror wrapped in nuclear blackmail, post-Kargil and post-Afghanistan. But in some ways Book I holds special interest as it speaks of childhood and Rajput memories that shaped the author's character and worldview. These also moulded his mind as he lived through Partition and the birth of Pakistan and reflected on nationalism, frontiers, near and far, that he was called upon to defend and explore as a soldier between 1962 and 1965, and on India's geo-strategic imperatives. He scoured archives for an indigenously-drawn map of India or the world but found none and concludes that the Indian tradition, though rich in many areas, ignored geography, from which flows history and politics. He further argues, as others have done, that the "idea" of India was civilizational, not territorial, which is why a newly Independent India seemed in no hurry to establish its boundaries or define any external perimeters of geo-strategic interest but, instead, almost casually gave away what it had been bequeathed by the Raj.

Jaswant Singh's searchlight on Pakistan is no less penetrating. Maybe the Congress did in a sense "communalize" India when it conceded separate electorates – against which Gandhi later rebelled. However, the two-nation theory was based on the League's assertion of an Islamic identity whose emphasis derived from the negative idea of not being Indian or Hindu (both misnomers coined by western Orientalists, leaving behind a legacy of abiding confusion). On August 15, 1947, Pakistan, "a negotiating idea" became a state, unprepared, unstructured and unrehearsed with regard to what it was supposed to mean. Jinnah did attempt a brave last minute correction in his August 11 inaugural address to the Pakistan constituent assembly. But it was too late. Nobody was listening at the confessional. Those who occupied the throne were muhajirs, refugees from an India left behind physically and spiritually, strangers in a new land which had not fought for Pakistan.

So to Jaswant Singh, the new Dominion became a "rented state", with the idea of Pakistan hung up on a board that read 'to-let'. Thus was born Pakistan, a state whose "aspirations are much greater than its accompanying reality". True, the Partition riots had generated hate and feelings of revenge – on both sides. No wonder that, having abandoned its rooted identity, history and culture, persistent denial of everything other than its Islamic heritage inevitably propelled Pakistan ideologically through militancy to jihad. He quotes Stephen Cohen's summation that perpetual hostility towards India became "the operational code of Pakistan's establishment", now fortified with an "Islamic" bomb.

The author is unsparing of Britain, which did not so much transfer power to India as abandon it, tired and helpless. Nor was this in acceptance of the triumph of nonviolent resistance, which is seen as another myth of that period. He is equally critical of Nehru, who convened an Asian Relations Conference for Asian unity and solidarity even as India was being partitioned and China was consolidating its boundaries at this country's expense. His subsequent essays are on socialism and economic regulation, pacifism and nonalignment which left behind a troubled legacy. It was therefore left to the BJP, in coalition with its NDA partners, to build anew.

This is an engaging and insightful thesis and compels attention for two reasons. Excessive romanticism about the Nehruvian legacy has long obscured reality and clarity not only with regard to the past but to the future as well. This is not to denigrate Nehru—and Jaswant Singh does not do so—but to read the tea leaves less subjectively. Equally, it provides for some understanding of the unstated premises of the BJP's underpinnings of raj dharma. At the same time, Jaswant Singh is no apologist for the BJP. He admits "two major negatives" on the BJP's scoreboard. The first relates to the handling of the Ayodhya Ram temple issue, leading to vandalism at the site and the subsequent demolition of the Babri mosque. This is ascribed to "a failure of control over the Ram temple movement". The second negative is "the loss of state control in Gujarat in 2002" after the Godhra episode that "compromised an impeccable record of a riot-free India over six years". Jaswant Singh is perhaps too coy on both counts. The 1990 rath yatra had sown dragon seeds of hatred that yielded a harvest of blood and fear. Gujarat further divided India, terrorizing the minority community to this day while the BJP continues to watch while terror feeds on terror. Incidentally, too, it was Savarkar, the RSS mentor, who first enunciated the two-nation theory in 1927. Unless exorcized, these myths too will continue to haunt us.

Despite claims always made by new regimes to breaking new ground, the reality in democratic societies is that the future grows out of the past. This Jaswant Singh confirms twice over. He acknowledges the efforts of successive prime ministers from Indira Gandhi to make India a nuclear weapons power, He confirms how when Narasimha Rao demitted office, he took aside his successor, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, and quietly said "I could not do it (conduct a nuclear weapon's test) though I very much wanted to, so it is really up to you now." Likewise, when Jaswant Singh learnt of the

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Illustrations from *Nature Omnibus* by Ruskin Bond.
Courtesy: Ratna Sagar

Folklore to Fantasy, Fiction to Cyberfiction

A few days ago, I was sitting on this windy, lonely, and an extremely beautiful Cornish clif overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. It was a crisp, sunny day, with a few other tourists pottering about. Extremely peaceful! If you looked down, you saw the waves dashing against the ragged rocks. Across the cliff, there were some caves. But this was not an ordinary cliff that was on the UK National Heritage tourist calendar. This was the castle at Tintagel that is associated with the legend of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table. There was really no castle as such, only some broken walls, abandoned, blocked and cordoned off tunnels and vast green plains with daisies. One has read enough of the myths and legends to be able to soak in the place and the experience of visiting Tintagel.

Folklore has been like the cultural bedrock that people turn to, especially in times when there seems to be an attempt or a movement to define "national literature". Folktales are produced, recorded and regurgitated for public consumption as they are the repositories of indigenous knowledge and culture. The need to define a national literature, especially for a new nation state, was what spurred the Germans and the British in the nineteenth century into documenting their folklore, and then there was the Irish National Movement of Literature with Lady Gregory, Synge, Yeats and Douglas Hyde at the forefront which led to the establishment of the Irish Folklore Commission in 1935. In India, there were some publications like Flora Annie Steele and R. C. Temple's *Tales of the Punjab Told By the People* or R. E. Enthoven's Folklore Notes. After 1947, the anthropologist Verrier Elwin and poet and critic A.K.Ramanujan attempted to collate folktales from the North East Frontier Province and Southern India respectively. These are considered seminal collections.

Folktales usually have simple repetitive narrative elements that are reminiscent of its oral past. They have anthropomorphic characters as in the Jataka and Panchatantra tales, and they are usually stories about ordinary people and incidents but may also include tales about creation and the supernatural. They can be political and allegorical, with religious, pagan or tribal elements, and moral and psychological dimensions. Sometimes there is an elision between folklore and religious mythology. Stories of one region are often very similar to those in another region and or country since it is known that tales travel and are adapted by the teller to local flavours. Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* is a classic example of this. It is about the quests of the Cornish King Arthur's Knights of the Round Table, but is actually a pot pourri of Cornish, French and Scottish stories that travelled with the fifteenth century tin traders between France, Glastonbury and Cornwall.

Literature for children and young adults has always relied a great deal on folklore for material and form. Many of the books reviewed in this issue are no exception to the rule. If they are not compilations of folktales, there are brilliantly narrated novels like Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson series that place Greek mythology within a contemporary setting. The books that have been reviewed are strong on story and tickle the reader's imagination sufficiently to want to explore more. Fantasy dominates once again, though this year I am pleased to find historical novels as well. It is amazing that there is a huge variety of books available for children and young adults, only a measly amount are sent for reviewing. For the first time in years of special children's literature issues of TBR we have received such few books and so this issue is necessarily slender.

There has always been a dissonance between books being sold in the market and what is sent for review. It is as if most publishers send review copies of books that are not selling easily or those that are considered as established literature or are linked to films or popular culture. But this year has been particularly appalling. There is a definite spurt in the publishing industry worldwide for children's books and young adult literature, but it is being barely reflected in the review copies sent to us. A lot of the books were either old hat, or movie merchandise or old material in new anthologies. Where were the other genres? The mysteries; detective fiction; romance; biographies; drama or poetry?

At the Frankfurt Book Fair this year, children's literature and young adult literature were popular. It was almost impossible to venture into Hall 3.0, the children and comics hall. It was always so packed to the gills. There was a huge variety of literature available. Apart from the standard collections of folklore, myths and legends, memoirs, conflict literature, biographies, historical novels, old classics and graphic novels. Fiction from different regions was being considered. Once again, short fiction was not as popular as novels. Surprisingly, fantasy and science fiction though visible, were not as prominent. A pity, since there is some good fantasy and science fiction around. But, one can also understand the fantasy fatigue that has set in.

Anyway, the good thing is that in the slim collection of books being reviewed in this issue as well as the articles included, the importance of a good story is constantly stressed—whether it is a dastangoi performance in real time or that of fan fiction in cyberspace. A good story will always grip one's attention!

Jaya Bhattacharji

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Cultural Signifiers

Vijaya Ramaswamy

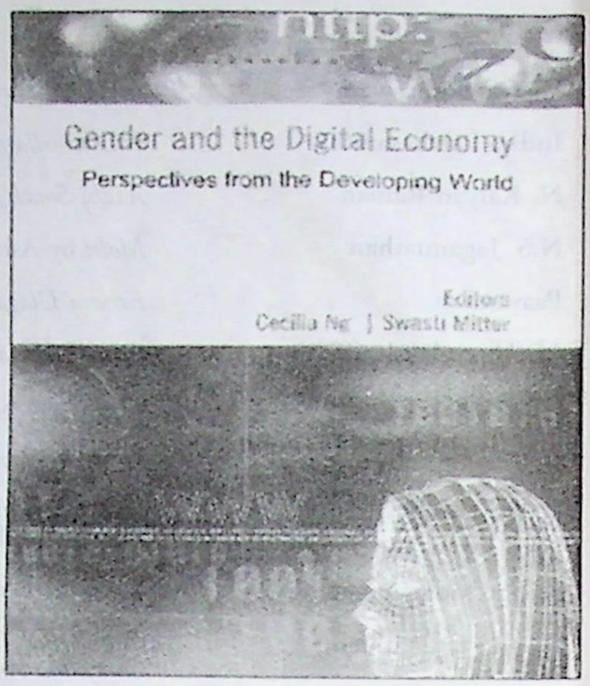
IN THOSE DAYS THERE WAS NO COFFEE: WRITINGS IN CULTURAL HISTORY
By A.R.Venkatachalapathy
Yoda Press, New Delhi, 2006, pp.xxiv+199, Rs. 495.00

Reading this book was as pleasurable as having a cup of that delicious brewed coffee that became a cultural signifier of the Tamil way of life in the course of the 19th and 20th centuries. To those who associate scholarship with dullness, I would strongly recommend Chalapathy's book since it is consistently both scholarly and lively.

The book is a collection of nine essays covering a gamut of Tamil experiences from drinking coffee to writing literature and playing politics in colonial Tamil Nadu. The first two essays are definitely seminal to the cultural historian. The first is titled 'In Those Days There Was No Coffee', Coffee Drinking and Middle Class Culture in Colonial Tamil Nadu. This brilliant essay breaks through the hierarchy of knowledge and hierarchy of sources that has characterized much of history writing. The hierarchy of knowledge is primarily created by looking at canonical texts in Sanskrit and their interpretation in English books written by Orientalists, Nationalists or any other brand of historical scholarship characterized by one 'ism' or another. Chalapathy uses collective memory, biographies, fiction and oral traditions to reconstruct the cultural past of the Tamils and in so doing, opens up refreshingly new dimensions to the study of social history. Since the second essay in the collection, 'Triumph of Tobacco', also treats of newly emerging consumption patterns, I would like to review the two together.

"In those days there was no coffee" was a stock phrase in autobiographies written in the early decades of the twentieth century. Coffee drinking became a cultural practice some time in the late twenties or thirties. To add to the store of recollections recorded by Chalapathy and in some sense to go beyond them, my mother, now in her eighties and herself the author of an autobiography *Bride at Ten, Mother at Fifteen,* says that in the early decades what went in the name of coffee was lots of chicory, dried ginger and coriander seeds with perhaps a whiff of coffee, perhaps not. The sweetening agent was not sugar but jaggery. Maybe Chalapathy should interview women with memories of that era to have an understanding of these proto-coffee brews.

The growing popularity of coffee and tobacco among the middle-class Tamils led to ideological battlelines being drawn between the pro-coffee and anti-coffee lobbies. Chalapathy quotes a 1914, *'Chindu'* a poetic form of folk narration/song, titled 'The quarrel between English Coffee and the Indian decoction of Cold Rice'. (I have here had the temerity to translate a title that Chalapathy had, perhaps wisely, left well alone.) The cold rice accuses coffee of marginalizing curd and buttermilk with even the lower classes demanding coffee instead of '*neeragaram*', which could be watery buttermilk or just the water drained from old rice with salt added to it. As a Tam-Bram located both within the culture and yet intellectually distanced from it, I remember wondering at the 'fourth degree' coffee given to the working maids while the mistress mixed 'first degree' coffee for herself and the family (see p.19 for reference to degree coffee). In Chalapathy's essay 'Tea' is posited as the cultural 'Other'. While the middle-class men (and women?) flocked in large numbers to the 'Brahmana Kapi Hotel' to have a cup of coffee with their favourite snacks, the urban working class plumbed for tea as being 'cheap and best'. A contemporary advertisement claimed that "By spending one paisa one can have five cups of this most excellent beverage" (p.26). This delightful essay concludes with R.K. Narayan's tribute to coffee. What Chalapathy could have included is that R.K. Narayan actually details his mother's method of preparing coffee in the pre-filter days. She would put a spoon of coffee powder in a glass, pour boiling water and distil the decoction through a thin cloth, adding milk and sugar to taste. Maybe the author could include quaint recipes of preparing coffee like this one in the second edition of his book. Tobacco follows a similar trajectory and the practice of snuff-taking and smoking is indigenized into an 'always existing Tamil tradition' by the colonial folk traditions. One of them says that the superiority of the best of the trinity—Brahma, Vishnu and Siva—was established by the fact that while the basil leaf dear to Vishnu and the '*vilvam*' (what is the botanical term?) fades, the tobacco leaf held by Brahma remained ever fresh! (pp. 37-38). To dive once more into my own store of cultural memories, a popular Tamil proverb likens a fresh, tightly rolled tobacco leaf to a young virgin—*'Pugai ilai virinthal pochchu, Penpillai chirithal pochchu'.* For a feminist cultural historian, this is a loaded proverb. Just as an unfurled tobacco leaf loses both quality and value, so a virgin who smiles loses her modesty and perhaps, in what seems the sub-text, her virginal freshness.



The next set of essays look at the beginning of political and social cartooning/lampooning, the writing of modern fiction, and the culture of the city of Chennai as a part of changing patterns of culture consumption. The lampooning is as much of British doublespeak as of the gullibility and perhaps even complicity of the Indian National Congress. The political implications of the seemingly innocuous art of cartooning can be seen by the fact that Subramania Bharati was the first to introduce cartoons in his newspaper *India* in 1906, and even tried to introduce an exclusive cartoon periodical called *Chitravali* in 1909 which, for obvious reasons, could not take off (pp. 45-51).

The fifth essay is on the writings of Pudumaipithan. While being deeply appreciative of Chalapathy's own efforts to bring the writing of Pudumaipithan (the *nom de plume* of C. Vridhachalam) to light, I feel that this chapter could have been historicized better in order to make it relevant for the cultural historian. Pudumaipithan in many of his stories (and he was a past-master of the this particular genre) turns upside down many accepted social (read brahmanical) norms. For instance in the story 'Sapa Vimochanam' (Redemption) the epic hero Rama is willing to redeem Ahalya from her so called sin while when it comes to his own wife, Sita, he reinforces patriarchal norms. When Sita narrates her forest ordeal, an outraged Agaligai asks, "Even if he (meaning Rama) asked you how did you do it?" Pudumaipithan emerged in the 1940s as the icon of modernism in Tamil literature. What I would have liked to see as a reviewer is the locating of Pudumaipithan within a historical context. If one were to talk only of the literary magazine *Manikkodi* and

Nehru: Dreamer or Warrior*

K.R. Narayanan

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU: A BIOGRAPHY, VOLUME ONE 1889-1947
By Sarvepalli Gopal
Jonathan Cape, London, 1975, pp. 398, £ 10.0

Biography, according to Lytton Strachey, is "the most delicate and humane of all the branches of the art of writing". It is also a difficult art particularly when the story told is that of Jawaharlal Nehru, a man who strode the world like 'a gentle colossus' until very recently, and whose life was an open one, openly lived almost in 'the glorious privacy of light'. The task is further compounded by the fact that the character of the hero is a complex mixture of the dreamer and the fighter, the aesthete and the politician, the thinker and the activist, the reformer and the revolutionary and the conformist and the iconoclast—all contained within the trembling general equilibrium of a rounded and integrated personality.

It has been said that the biographer's task is to reveal the real man lurking behind the well-known personality. The real Nehru, for all we know, is very much the familiar Nehru, and it is just as well that in this first volume of what promises to be a great trilogy on Nehru, Dr. Gopal has not embarked upon a Freudian exploration into the origins of his hero's psychological make-up, but has adopted the historical method of biography. In a sense the method was determined by the nature of the subject matter itself and by the fact that the author is himself an eminent historian. Nehru was a man of immense reticence, and as Dr. Gopal points out about the *Autobiography*, after 600 close-knit pages of it Jawaharlal's "privacy remains unbroken", a privacy which still remains unviolated even after the 400 pages of Gopal's book.

Though the author has eschewed the unprofitable psychological approach, the book contains a series of brief but penetrating glimpses and analyses of the mind and character of Nehru and of the formative influences that fashioned his personality and outlook. Some would have us believe that Jawaharlal was primarily a product of English education. Nirad Chaudhuri, that brilliant literary knight-errant of the British Raj, has drawn a picture of Nehru as "an English volunteer who had taken up the cause of Indian independence" and whose personality and ideas were fully formed when he returned from England in 1912. To claim great Indians mainly as the outcome of the British impact is a kind of wistful, residual colonialist-intellectual attitude very much in vogue in English literary circles. Gandhi, who in his time was the arch anarchist and the half-naked fakir, is today for them a product of the *Bible*, Ruskin, Thoreau and Tolstoy rather than of the *Upanishads*, the *Puranas* and the *Bhagwad Gita*; and Nehru a Harrow and Cambridge boy and a Fabian fallen among the degenerate Indians and distracted to death by moral conflicts and dilemmas under an Eastern clime!

Dr. Gopal has stirred a hornet's nest in England by challenging this plausible myth and entitling the chapter on Nehru's seven-year spell in England as the "Unformative Years". He points out that in Cambridge the young Nehru was little attracted by Fabianism and, though enrolled as a student at the London School of Economics, he did not attend many lectures at that famous institution. As for the Labour Party, though he developed a warm friendship with Harold Laski, Stafford Cripps and Aneurin Bevan, he had looked upon the generality of Labour leadership as "sanctimonious and canting humbugs". Of course, Nehru'slove for the English people, English literature and English institutions was a different matter.

The major formative influences on Nehru have been traced in this book to his involvement with the rural masses of the Uttar Pradesh in the early twenties, his visit to Europe in 1926-27, and the relationship with Gandhi and his father Motilal. According to Gopal, the intimate contact with Indian peasantry gave "a new and permanent dimension to his outlook". It not only "re-Indianized" him but eventually converted "the pink and pretty young man" into a lover of swadeshi and a radical revolutionary.

The process was powerfully accelerated by his visit to Europe. "It was this spell in Europe", writes Gopal, "and not the earlier years at Harrow and Cambridge, that was to provide Jawaharlal with his real political education". The Congress of the Anti-Imperialist League at Brussels was a turning point in his intellectual development. It was at this Congress that he came to link India's freedom movement with the wider anti-imperialist struggle in the world and to interpret Indian independence in terms of economic and social emancipation of the peasants and the workers. The visit to the Soviet Union further reinforced this, but neither at Brussels nor at Moscow was the independence of his mind and judgement overcome by the enchantment of Marxist ideology.

The main substance of the biography is history, the history of the nationalist period as seen and enacted through Nehru. This basic portion of the book is remarkable for judicious selection, neat arrangement, masterly compression and sound interpretation of the overwhelming mass of material that is available. The two chapters entitled "Out of Tune with Congress" and "War Crisis" constitute particularly terse and elegant pieces of historical biographical writing. Incidentally, he has set the record straight with regard to the charge against Nehru that the latter was responsible for the creation of Pakistan by his rejection of the proposal for a coalition with the Muslim League in U.P. after the 1937 elections and by an erratic statement he made at Bombay after the visit of the British Cabinet Mission. "Pakistan", says Gopal, "was not made inevitable by the statements of Jawaharlal. They, at the most, provided Jinnah with an opening." An opening, one might add, among several others like "the ill-timed tactics of Rajagopalachari and Gandhi", the one by making a proposal which conceded the substance of Pakistan and the other by treating Jinnah as an equal in negotiations. Of course the reasons for the creation of Pakistan were deeper than the tactical mistakes made by the leaders of the Congress, one of the most important reasons being British imperialist policy itself.

In the art of acquiring and exercising power, Jawaharlal was an exquisitely subtle performer, all his openness and idealism notwithstanding. Dr. Gopal does not discuss this crucial question nor does he advance a power-political thesis, though much can be deduced from his narrative and analysis. Without being a Fabian, Nehru was an adept in Fabian tactics, in the *Discovery* he

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In the art of acquiring and exercising power, Jawaharlal was an exquisitely subtle performer, all his openness and idealism notwithstanding. Dr. Gopal does not discuss this crucial question nor does he advance a power-political thesis, though much can be deduced from his narrative and analysis. Without being a Fabian, Nehru was an adept in Fabian tactics, in the *Discovery* he called it "the strategy of indirectness". It was through this particular strategy that he brought the Congress eventually to the acceptance of the concepts of full independence, planning and democratic socialism and internationalism.

called it "the strategy of indirectness". It was through this particular strategy that he brought the Congress eventually to the acceptance of the concepts of full independence, planning and democratic socialism and internationalism. It is again in accordance with this strategy that, while being out of tune with the conservative leadership of the Congress, he worked and cooperated with it and reached the summit of power almost as a natural evolutionary process. Though an idealist, he was a realist and a man of compromise who knew that the receptivity of a people to an idea was not less important than the validity of the idea itself. Above all he was conscious that, in the Indian context, the way to the liberation of the country and the conquest of power did not lie in breaking with Gandhi and the Congress. The series of compromises in politics in which Jawaharlal was involved, as on the Dominion Status issue in 1928 and on Office Acceptance and the Quit India resolution, have to be seen against this background. Dr. Gopal succinctly sums up this continuous rebellion and accommodation of Jawaharlal within the Congress as "a circumscribed revolt".

Was Nehru a Marxist Socialist, a Fabian Socialist, an Utopian-Gandhian Socialist or a mere liberal democrat? And was he a man who was indecisive, imprecise and without a clear political mind of his own? Dr. Gopal is somewhat uncertain in his judgement on this subject. Nehru himself had always rejected the attempt to have him classified in doctrinaire terms. After all the universe of ideas has not been exhausted by the existing rigid political and ideological categorizations. There could be other ideas and other combinations of existing ideas to suit changing circumstances and times. At one place Dr. Gopal refers to Nehru speaking of India evolving her own methods and adjusting them to suit her traditions and conditions. One cannot avoid the conclusion that Nehru was really in search of an Indian way to socialism and democracy by evolving Indian ideas and methods and integrating into them, in a creative manner, relevant ideas and methods developed in other countries. This is probably the reason for the tentativeness and the hesitancy underlying Nehru's political philosophy and actions.

It is clear that Nehru was not one of those susceptible to be intoxicated by an ideology. He was essentially a skeptical rationalist with the irrational capacity of faith in the human being and in the betterment of man. He was that rare kind of a social democrat who, in the words of Aneurin Bevan, possesses the quality of "pursuing with passion qualified judgements". The political philosophy of Nehru can be summed up in that one phrase—the pursuit of qualified judgements with passion.

This has given credence to the popular impression that Nehru was a romantic Hamlet—India's 'sweet prince'. In an eloquent passage, Dr. Gopal describes Nehru as follows: "Estranged from his own people by being soaked in the exploiter's culture, he was a mixed-up being, yearning for roots and struggling to work out his own destiny. Tortured by doubt, impressive in his indecision, agonizing over all sides of every question, always asking to what end was the long, wearying struggle, he provided the picture of a warm and vulnerable human being". To get a complete idea of the personality of Nehru this must be read together with the statement by Dr. Gopal that the moral and ethical values which Nehru had built around himself gave him serenity and strength. He used to carry a copy of the *Gita* with him, and once he advised his daughter: 'All we can do is to face our job and do it as well as we can and remain as tranquil as we can in spite of shock and disaster". His was the philosophy of the *Gita*, with a strong element of modern skeptical rationalism added to it, rather than that of a Hamlet sicklied over with the pale cast of thought. Fundamentally Nehru was not a soliloquizing and procrastinating Hamlet, but Arjuna the warrior with the quality to doubt and to question.

It is essentially such a Nehru who emerges from the scholarly pages of Dr. Sarvepalli Gopal's biography, written in lucid and crystalline style breaking occasionally into a fine flourish. Though the author began the book by saying that it was difficult to be objective about one who was the hero of his youth, he has managed to eschew deification altogether and has produced a biography that is both authentic and sympathetic. The price at £ 10 is somewhat exasperating. While one looks forward to the next two volumes of the biography, one also hopes for a less expensive Indian edition. ■

Arguing With Reason

Pulin B. Nayak

THE ARGUMENTATIVE INDIAN: WRITINGS ON INDIAN HISTORY, CULTURE AND IDENTITY
By Amartya Sen
Penguin, New Delhi, 2005, pp. xx + 409, Rs.650.00

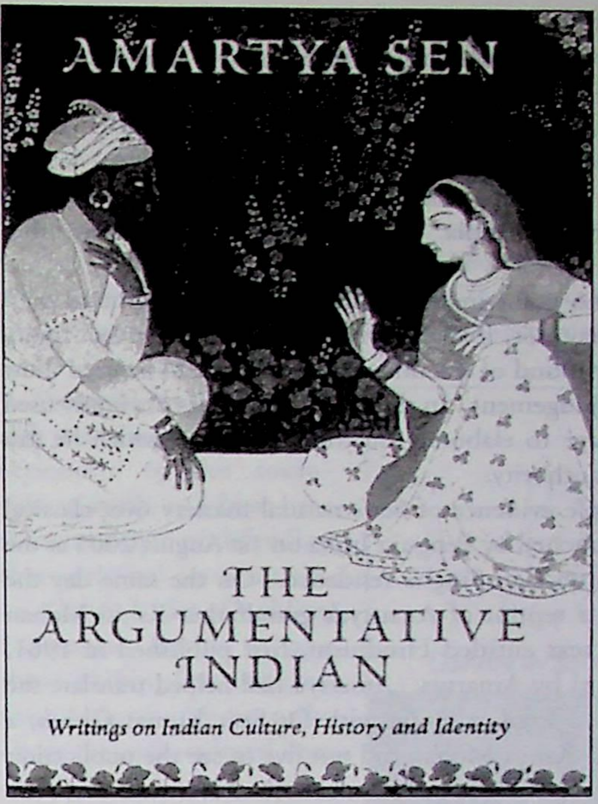
It would be no exaggeration to say that Amartya Sen has an iconic and towering presence in the world of economics in present times. The sheer range as well as depth of his work is formidable even by the standards of his fellow Nobel laureates in the subject in the last thirty-five years or more. His work has included original formulations in choice of techniques, which was his doctoral dissertation at Cambridge, to social choice theory to explorations in poverty and inequality to broad and foundational issues that deal with the interface between economics and philosophy. Robert Solow, Professor of Economics at MIT and fellow Nobel laureate, has called Amartya the 'conscience of economics' for his tireless espousal of the cause of the deprived and the downtrodden.

What is even more remarkable is that during the past half century while he has been engaged in formal and at times quite abstract and technical research in economics he has at the same time quite energetically engaged in and debated broader social, political, philosophical and cultural issues, where he has addressed the lay public, and not necessarily only the trained economist. The range here too is equally stunning: he has written on the notion of class in India, he has made assessments of Rabindranath Tagore's oeuvre, and he has at length argued why, in his estimation, India ought not to have gone in for the nuclear option. Sen has never shied away from presenting his deeply felt views with a degree of clarity, cogency and analytical rigour as well as vigour that one has come to routinely expect of him.

The book at hand is truly magisterial and its scope absolutely breathtaking. It contains sixteen essays on diverse topics but the connecting thread is the celebration of the argumentative tradition in India. Sen laments the relative neglect and decline of this tradition in recent times. He particularly takes to task the advocates of the Hindutva movement, 'the promoters of a narrowly Hindu view of Indian civilization' (pp. ix-x) and 'especially those who are given to vandalizing places of worship of other religions' (p. xi).

The point that Sen emphasizes repeatedly is that social, religious and political debates from age old times in India have always admitted of diverse points of view, the intellectual tradition has always been highly vibrant, and heterodoxy has always been welcomed. Unfortunately in recent years there has been a recrudescence of narrow sectarian points of view, which have been adopted by certain political parties for immediate electoral gains. This has resulted in a grave threat to communal and civil peace and harmony. By a long margin if there is a single dark aspect of the contemporary socio-political scene in India in the last one-and-a-half decades one would have to agree that it is this. Sen's work is an attempt at a comprehensive demolition of the narrow sectarian view and to make a clear case for restoring the tradition of free debate and heterodoxy, for it is the latter course alone which would enable any country or polity, India included, to achieve its true potential.

The evidence that Sen marshals to argue his thesis is truly formidable. The essays are accompanied by 34 pages of bibliographical notes. There are references to the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* as also to the writings of Dara Shikoh, William Jones, Rabindranath Tagore and John Rawls, among myriad others. Sen moves through the corridors of history, philosophy, economics and culture with dazzling ease and sure footedness. But there are no short cuts. These are the essays of a hard working and meticulous



scholar.

Two historical figures that loom large in the book are the great emperors Ashoka and Akbar. Both these personages championed open and free debate. Emperor Ashoka desired that arguments ought to be conducted 'with restraint in regard to speech', and that 'a person must not do reverence to his own sect or disparage the beliefs of another without reason'. He went on to add that by so doing a person would 'inflict, by such conduct, the severest injury to his own sect'. Nearly one thousand and eight hundred years later the Mughal emperor Akbar, in the late sixteenth century AD, laid the formal foundations of a secular legal structure and of religious neutrality of the state. Akbar believed that 'no man should be interfered with on account of religion, and anyone is to be allowed to go over to a religion that pleases him'.

One of the salient issues that Sen has touched upon repeatedly in recent years is the received view in the Western imagination that the Indian thought system is essentially mystical and spiritual rather than scientific and rational. Sen brings to bear all the intellectual fire power at his command to roundly dispel this view. There is no denying that India's ancient texts, the Vedas and the Upanishads, bear testimony to the rich religious, mystical and spiritual tradition. Sen reminds us that the great Sanskrit epic Mahabharata is about seven times as long as the Iliad and the Odyssey put together. Yet it is also true that the scientific and the rational tradition of India has been remarkably capacious. This is reflected in Aryabhata's work, circa 499 CE, as well as the works of Varahamihira, Brahmagupta and Bhaskara, among many others. These thinkers writing on mathematics and astronomy made foundational contributions to the development and use of the decimal system as well as to trigonometry. They also had a profound impact on the works of Arabic and Iranian scholars.

Reading through the book it is possible to get the impression that Sen locates most of the positive and valued instances of the Indian argumentative tradition in ancient or medieval India. This however would not be wholly correct. There is a substantial assessment of Tagore in the essay 'Tagore and his India' which contains a nuanced assessment, among others, of Tagore and Gandhi in terms of their varied worldview. Elsewhere in the book there are assessments of Nehru, especially in a chapter entitled 'Tryst with Destiny', and there is, for example, an extremely cogent and compelling argument as to why India ought to have eschewed the nuclear option in the essay entitled 'India and the Bomb'.

It would be true however to say that if one is looking for a comprehensive account of the political, social and economic debates of the turbulent half century prior to India's independence, in which the lead actors were Gandhi, Nehru, Subhas Bose, Jinnah and Ambedkar, among the many stellar actors, this book is not the right source to consider. But then there is no reason why one should expect an author to say everything about a subject. Sen himself is remarkably clear about the scope of the enterprise. Right in the beginning he disabuses the reader of any possible misconception on

this score. He writes:

'Any attempt to talk about the culture of the country, or about its past history or contemporary politics, must inescapably involve considerable selection. I need not, therefore, labour the point that the focus on the argumentative tradition in this work is also a result of this choice. It does not reflect a belief that this is the only reasonable way of thinking about history or culture or politics of India. I am very aware that there are other ways of proceeding' (p. ix).

There is therefore no point in expecting an author to expound on a theme that he or she may not, for whatever reason, wish to dwell upon. The arguer's choice of the kind of terrain and the fusillade to be used must be left to his or her best judgement. In this instance Sen has obviously used his comparative advantage to elaborate on those issues on which he can speak with insight and authority.

The book gives ample evidence of Sen's natural mastery over classical Sanskrit texts. It was launched by Penguin India on 1st August 2005 at the Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh's residence. On the same day the publishers also released a reprint of Amartya's grandfather Kshiti Mohan Sen's remarkably pithy text entitled Hinduism, first published in 1961, now with a new foreword by Amartya. Amartya had helped translate the original Bengali text into English along with Dr Sisir Kumar Ghosh, a friend of Kshiti Mohan. Kshiti Mohan did not live to see the publication of the English translation, but it was an instant success. It is clear that Sen's grounding in the areas that he has chosen to dwell upon in the book under review goes back to those early years.

Among the several nuggets that the book leads up to is the most informative and delightful essay on 'India through its Calendars'. India provides a rich array of calendrical systems, with some of their histories stretching over several thousand years. Akbar tried to study and understand the different calendars in use in India, along with his study of religions. We are informed that some time in 1584 CE, he had tried to propose a synthetic calendar for the country as a whole, the 'Tarikh-ilahi', just as he also proposed an amalgamated religion, the 'Din-i-ilahi', drawing on the different religions that existed in India (p. 319).

To get a feel of the diversity of calendars we have in India Sen uses the *Whitaker's Almanack* to point out that the Gregorian year 2000 CE corresponded with: (1) year 6001 in the Kaliyuga calendar (2) year 2544 in the Buddha Nirvana calendar (3) year 2057 in the Vikram Samvat calendar (4) year 1922 in the Saka calendar (5) year 1921 of the Vedanga Jyotisa calendar (6) year 1407 in the Bengali San calendar and (7) year 1176 in the Kollam calendar. And the important thing to note is that this list is far from being exhaustive. There are, for example, the Mahavira Nirvana calendar associated with Jainism, the Islamic Hijri calendar, the Parsee calendar, the Judaic calendar in local use in Kerala and various versions of Christian date systems. There can hardly be a more telling illustration of the diversity that this country lives with as part of its daily existence.

There need be no unanimity in this, but it is possible to argue that among all Indians of the past century the three most towering are Tagore, Gandhi and Nehru, in the order of their birth and death. In the pages of this book all of them have been admiringly considered and various aspects of their lives and thoughts highlighted. But it would seem that the one for whom Amartya reserves a degree of almost unblemished admiration is Rabindranath Tagore. The reasons are not difficult to seek. Amartya's grandfather Kshiti Mohan Sen was a close associate of Rabindranath. Amartya went to school in Tagore's Santiniketan. These two factors must have contributed to Amartya's estimation of the great bard and sage. But finally what must matter the most would have to be the whole persona of Tagore, defined by his life and work.

The essay on 'Tagore and his India' is possibly the most nuanced and perceptive in the entire book. It was first published in 1997, roughly around the completion of the fiftieth anniversary of Indian independence. After a phase of early adulation of his poetry by Yeats and others leading to the award of the Nobel Prize in literature in 1913, Tagore had to come up against some very scathing criticism. In 1937 Graham Greene said: 'As for Rabindranath Tagore, I cannot believe that anyone but Mr Yeats can still take his poems very seriously'. After his early admiration of Tagore's work W.B. Yeats had become progressively more critical, saying in 1935, 'Damn Tagore'. What he particularly disliked was Tagore's own English translations of his Bengali work. He had remarked: 'Tagore does not know English, no Indian knows English'.

Yet Tagore had his loyal band of admirers, certainly within Bengal and India but in the rest of the world as well. In Germany, in particular, Schlegel, Schelling, Herder and Schopehnahuer had already looked to the East for spiritual wisdom, and Tagore's humanism seemed like a natural source of inspiration. Yasunari Kawabata, the first Japanese Nobel laureate in literature, remembered his middle school days of meeting 'this sage like poet'. There is a poignant story of Susan Owen, mother of Wilfred Owen, who wrote to Tagore in 1920, describing her last conversations with her son before he left for the war which would take his life. When Wilfred's pocket notebook was returned to his mother, she found written in her son's handwriting Tagore's words: 'When I go from hence, let this be my parting word'.

It is not that Tagore did not have his share of critics within India. The sharpest, by a long margin, were from within the Bengali literary establishment. The attackers were mostly from the Kallol group, but there were others belonging to Shanibarer Chithi and Kalikalam. Tagore also particularly courted controversy when he expressed his disenchantment with nationalism. The western criticism he was somehow able to take in his stride with a degree of bemused nonchalance, but it seems the criticism from within Bengal pained him the most. According to Nirad Chaudhuri, 'He was abnormally sensitive, and did not possess the knack for cool disdain which a man of his social position naturally should have had'. In a letter to Suniti Kumar Chatterjee written in 1929 Tagore complains: 'Generally speaking, we are naturally curious about someone who has been labelled controversial. But the comments against me have been spiteful'.

Yet the nobility and the humanity of Tagore's mammoth body of poetry and prose, musical compositions and painting, combined with his simplicity and sage like bearing place him at a towering and iconic status which is certainly without parallel in India of modern times. It is just as well that Amartya should be an unstinting admirer of Tagore. Yet another, not insubstantial, reason, in addition to the ones mentioned above, could be Tagore's clear and lucid celebration of 'freedom' which Amartya has himself grappled with in his formal work as an economist and a philosopher. The immortal words of *Gitanjali* hark to a world 'Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high; Where knowledge is free; Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls; ...Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake'.

Tagore had the highest regard for Gandhi. It is he who first called him Mahatma. He knew that it was Gandhi alone who knew the pulse of the Indian masses and it is he alone who could awaken and lead them into that heaven of freedom. Yet he had differences with him on a number of subjects, including nationalism, patriotism and the role of rationality and science. Even though Sen too has the highest regard for Gandhi it is not difficult to understand that his personal position on nationalism and rationality is closer to Tagore than to Gandhi.

The book provides a cerebral fare of all these and much more. It should be a must read for all serious students, not only in colleges and universities, of Indian history, culture, economics and politics. One has at hand the thoughts of the most towering, rational and engaged Indian thinker of modern times who has been energetically arguing away with poise and clarity for half a century. And judging by his recent performance in Delhi in mid December 2005, he seems to be going strong.■

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Gandhi and Identity Formation

Rakesh Batabyal

THE MAKING OF A POLITICAL REFORMER: GANDHI IN SOUTH AFRICA, 1893-1914
By Surendra Bhana and Goolam Vahed
Manohar, Delhi, 2005, pp.181, Rs. 495.00

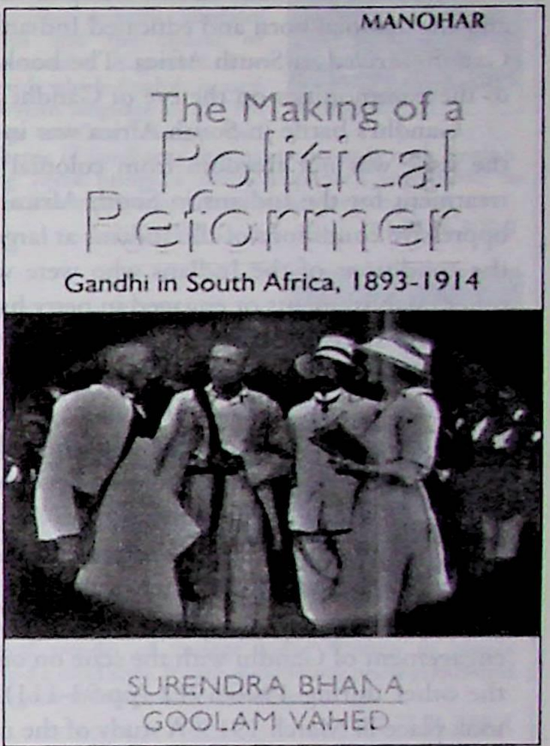
It was probably in 1990 that as an impressionable student embarking on a specialized study of history, I heard Fatima Meer, a close associate of Nelson Mandela in the African National Congress speaking about the hopes and aspirations of the Africans, Indians and others in a society emerging out of the shadow of the apartheid system. In reply to one of my questions about the future of the people of Indian origin and their relations with the Africans, her answer was optimistic, characteristic of those who have waged a struggle. She talked about the united destiny of not only the two but of the Whites as well in a republican and non-racist South Africa. In response to a question of assimilation of the Indians with the local African populations, she argued that the Indians and their role, in the past and the future, should not be evaluated merely in terms of the level of social and cultural assimilation as Indians quite often do not even intermingle with their own people if they are not of the same caste. It should rather be viewed in terms of aspirations and dreams and a political system attentive of such aspiration.

It is interesting that in many other locations, the people of Indian origin have been part of the political system, which quite often has taken a racial or ethnic turn, and has resulted in the political marginalization of the Indians in spite of their engagement with the political processes. Fiji, Surinam, Guyana, and closer home Sri Lanka are prime examples of such political developments. It reminded me of the writings of Shiva Naipaul, the deceased elder brother of V.S. Naipaul, who, writing in the wake of the Black power movement in the 1960s, sketched the argument of the Black groups who accused the Indians in the West Indies of looking down upon the Black population and not intermingling with them. The same accusations were heard in Fiji, Surinam, and even in Mauritius. Indians are said to be unwilling to be part of the cultural and political life of the Black population. The resultant attacks on the Indians were blamed on such an attitude.

The underlying logic of such assertions is that it is the Indians who are responsible for the political backlash against them. Recently a popular South African playwright Nklanhla Hlangwane quoted Gandhi to suggest that he regarded the Africans as inferior beings and used the example to indicate the continued unwillingness of the Indians to share power with Africans (p.150). There is a counter argument posed by many that Gandhi's contribution should be looked at from an altogether different perspective. And it is here that this beautiful little book makes a singular contribution.

Political movements do not grow without a given material context. Gandhi's struggle in South Africa, which culminated in the Satyagraha campaign of 1912-13, too had a material context. Interestingly, most works on Gandhi in South Africa are teleological in nature, as they try and locate the roots and evolution of the later-day Gandhian strategies in the practices and strategies that he would use in South Africa. This book is different. It defines the material conditions in which Gandhi would practise his politics in South Africa. In the chapter entitled 'Gandhi, Africans and Indians in Colonial Natal' the authors very ably detail the material background in which contradictions were beginning to emerge and strong racial connotations in them. One of the real issues was the transfer of land to Indians, which neither the White population nor the Zulus were able to adjust themselves to. There were all the possibilities of these contradictions taking a racist line, as legitimation of the ruling power was on the basis of race. It is here that one is also able to understand the meaning of cultural hegemony when he argues that the Indians also internalized many of the racist notions about the Africans. It was therefore easy in such a situation to construct an identity of Indian by defining the 'other'. Race being the legitimation criterion of such identity formation, Indianness, Africanness or the Whiteness – all could have based themselves on it. The authors observe that :

> Africans responded to the colonial structures by developing identities in relation to Whiteness and Indianness. There was competition and conflict in the political, economic, and social spheres as the three groups came into contact with each other.



The authors however soon shift their discussion from the economic to the socio-cultural realm and from here the second line of defending their original proposition, i.e., Gandhi's idea of building Indianness, begins to take shape. Shifting from material foundations it now talks about the socio-cultural lives of the Indian communities, the Hindu, the Muslims and the Christians. It is in this context that this book becomes an interesting document of social research. Surendra Bhana and Goolam Vahed try a meticulous study of the cultural and religious lives of the three important religious communities that had large enough presence in South Africa in the last years of the 19th century. They try and locate Gandhi's political activities in this cultural and social milieu to suggest that Gandhi evolved a double plank strategy as part of his struggle against the state in South Africa. This included, first making the issue of the Indians, with that of the indentured labourers, an issue of equality within the British Imperial structure. Second, to do this he also wanted to create a common front of the Indians which would try and transcend the loyalties to a particular religious and sectarian groups in order to claim imperial attention. In fact, Gandhi's attempt to link the issues of the Indian to the larger domain of the British Empire had a serious consequence, as we shall see, even for the later day political movement in South Africa.

The construction of Indianness by Gandhi, the authors suggest was a major political strategy. But as the authors argue, politics was not unconnected with religion and culture at this point of time. And again as they show, for Gandhi religion was ethical too and hence the political had an ethical dimension. It is within this political parameter that the authors would argue the Indianess was being created. Though the authors do not say this in so many words, the discussion in the book reveals an interesting theme which contradicts the latter day critics of Gandhi, who brand him as a racist or believer in hierarchies. Indianness is being created not in relation to any other. It was an effort to transcend the narrow limits for a larger entity, that too for a claim of equality. Therefore, though the material foundation of the society might have been creating schism between the Indians and the Zulus of Natal for example, the creation of Indianness was not thought to be in any such terms.

The cultural life of the different communities which arrived in South Africa from India in this part of the century was defined greatly by their religious affiliation. For Muslims, therefore, the socio-cultural life was defined by helping build mosques, the first one being the mosque on Grey Street in 1881; donations to educational institutions and participating in Muharram, etc., were another area of engagement. The different Hindu

communities too were moved by the religious festivals as well as the activities of the reformist and other groups who were engaged in the religious movements in India. There were also regular visits of the reformist leaders of Arya Samaj as well as the Sanatan Dharma Sabha. The communities, for example, the Muslims of western India, Gujarat, had regular contact with the villages and contributed to the activities back home. On the larger plane the Muslim community was aware and influenced by the Aligarh movement and some were even educated. By 1912-13 a very powerful pan-Islamic trend too became evident among the Indians. A strong but small Indian Christian community too was there. Amidst all these activities and influences among the Indians there existed a deep divide between the indentured labour and the colonial born and educated Indians. It was in such a situation that Gandhi arrived in South Africa. The book beautifully brings out the lives of the communities on the eve of Gandhi's arrival.

Gandhi's battle in South Africa was in short a political struggle where the issue was not freedom from colonial rule but to win equal and fair treatment for the Indians in South Africa. To add to it was the poor and oppressive conditions of the Indians at large and in particular to ameliorate the conditions of the Indians who were working in the mines, land and other establishments or engaged in petty business. There was no great hope from the state and the officials as they themselves legitimized acts of discrimination that smacked of racial discrimination. This, therefore, meant that Gandhi had to look for new avenues of support in his battle for a better treatment of Indians. And it is here that the study of the strategy that Gandhi evolved in such a situation becomes crucial.

The attitude of the state and the lines for the ensuing battle became clear only gradually. This involved, on the part of Gandhi, not only an understanding of the character of the South African state but also putting in place a strategy by the Indian communities. This process saw the masterly engagement of Gandhi with the state on one hand and with the Indians on the other during 1906-1912 (pp.93-111). The final clash with the state took place in March 1913. A study of the now famous Satyagraha march of 1913 and its background brings to the fore the underlying discriminating character of the state and the way Gandhi tried and positioned the opposition against it. In March 1913 the Supreme Court of South Africa issued a judgement on the legal status of Indian marriages. This came in the wake of the immigration authorities' refusal to allow Hasen Essop's wife to land in 1912 because "she did not satisfy the requirements of a legal spouse". "In agreeing with the decision", the author argues, " Justice Searle ignored the fact that in India Hassan Essop was not required to register his marriage before an officer of the Law"(p.113). It was exactly at this time that the Natal Supreme Court ruled that Hindu and Muslim marriages were not "monogamous". Smuts inflamed the Indian feelings further by stating that divorce came easily to Muslim men who simply had to say "voetsek"(get lost) to their wives (p.113).

Thus, the legal status of marriage of Indians became an important issue, which provided the basis for Gandhi's agitation. The second issue was the imposition of a tax of three pounds. In order to keep " the contact labourers locked into the system" the Natal legislature passed a law in 1895 asking "all *indentured expired* Indians over the age of sixteen to pay a tax of 3 pounds. Once the law came into effect in 1901, it resulted in great hardship for the freed Indian families" (p.113).

The authors suggest that Gandhi was basically in favour of abolition of the tax but he wanted public support behind such a demand. He wanted, as the authors suggest, "the Natal Indian Congress to organize a mass meeting and to send a petition to the Prime Minister of Natal from at least 15,000 Indians. If Parliament rejected the petition, Gandhi continued, the matter should go to the Imperial Government. The organisers must procure the support of other bodies in South Africa" (p.114).

The Immigrant Regulation Act went into effect on 1 August 1913. After the initial opposition from different groups regarding his proposed plan of action, Gandhi finally launched the "passive resistance campaign in September" (p.117). By mid-October the strike spread to the railway barracks and coal mines around Newcastle. One witnesses the gradual extension of the resistance throughout the Indian areas despite opposition from many influential Indians who did not believe that Gandhi's policy was of any consequence for the lives of the Indians. It is while reading about the unfolding of the movement and the way Gandhi tried and used opportunities to his advantage that one learns how political strategies evolve and how Gandhi never separated strategies and principles.

First, they have underscored a very significant aspect of the movement, i.e., the legalistic or semi-legalistic nature of the state structure and how Gandhi's understanding approximated this aspect of colonial rule. Historian Bipan Chandra had for the first time analysed this in his presidential address at the Indian History Congress in 1977. In his effort to theorize the National Movement, Chandra had shown how Gandhi and the Indian leadership understood the semi-legal or quasi-legal nature of the Indian state. This, he had argued, also explained the different character of the Indian national movement and the resultant political system. Gandhi, as the authors have tried to show, wanted to go up to the limits of the law to persuade the lawmakers to change the discriminatory laws. And it is here that the issue of three pounds was soon made the symbol of the whole legal and political structure rather than merely a tax.

This strategy of evolving Indianness, they argue, was worked on the understanding that the demand for improvement of the legal and economic status of the Indians had to be made as their being the citizens of the Empire. It is here, the authors argue, and quite convincingly, that Gandhi tried to yoke the issue of the Indians in South Africa into the overall structure of the British Empire. It may be worth noticing that very few works have been written on Gandhi's understanding of the colonial system. Reading this book makes one feel that Gandhi's understanding of the colonial structure is very important in a globalizing world where a lot of sound and fury is spent on writing on the new Empire. Gandhi's yoking the issue under the imperial rubric also meant that in future when "apartheid" was clamped down as state policy, the opposition to it, in which India played a vital role too took a global dimension.

It is at this point that one discerns an attempt by the authors to relate the nature of thestate to the character of the mass movement. Gandhi realized that the movement had to be persuasive, peaceful and must have the support of those who, though "racially" different believed in similar ideas. It is because of this that he bitterly opposed those Indians who wanted to give it a racial colour by despising him for having the Pollacks and Kallenbachs as his supporters. Similarly, the movement meant that he presented the state with all the time in the world to fulfil its commitment.

It is in this context that one may locate his attempt to place the Zulus or the Africans in the whole matter. He, as the authors have themselves suggested, ruled out their participation not because he believed they were inferior or their oppression was of less significance. As he had himself pointed out, the demand and struggle of the Africans had a much bigger dimension and of much deeper legitimacy, than those of the Indians. The Gandhian strategy was not to involve them in the Indians' struggle for equality within the imperial domain. He in fact had not yet thought of a strategy to fight the empire on the question of freedom and he was sure that the Africans' fight was to be for freedom. His close relations and proximity with the Whites and the Jews like Pollack, Kallenbach, etc., drew very sarcastic comments from the Indian leaders but Gandhi never left them and in fact attacked those who showed narrowness in these terms. African demands were legitimate and the structures of their oppression were different and hence maybe peaceful techniques were not useful. He apparently had said that they were not equipped to handle such a technique. But the Africans have proved him wrong in South Africa where they won their independence from apartheid in using the strategy and technique that he had used. It is not a sheer coincidence that the leader of the Africans in this success, Nelson Mandela, acknowledged Gandhi, his principle and his strategy. Bhana and Wahed have helped history to speak.■

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In India, Everyone!

Kamal Mitra Chenoy

WHO WANTS DEMOCRACY?
By Javeed Alam
Orient Longman, Delhi, 2004, pp.143, Rs. 175.00

Who wants democracy? A terribly simpleminded question many might say. In an Indian democracy everyone must. But as Javeed Alam, a prominent political theorist shows in this simply, yet elegantly written book the answer to his basic question is not quite that simple. Using data compiled from a study by V.B. Singh and Subrata Mitra, Professor Alam statistically illustrates some of his always interesting, often profound findings.

For example, in 1971 only 48 per cent of the Indian electorate thought that their vote had any impact on how the country is governed. By 1996, this had climbed to a little less than 60 per cent, an increase that in a democracy marked by mass poverty and inequality, is as Alam notes "enormous". In this there is a specially high regard for the judiciary and the election commission. In 1996, more than 75 per cent felt these functioned in a commendable manner; a degree of confidence that many democracies, including in the global North would envy. Interestingly, in the seventies, eighties and nineties, when there was a perceptible decline in political institutions which scholars like Rajni Kothari, James Manor, et. al. commented on at the time, close to 70 per cent of those polled opposed a system without parties and elections. This demonstrated not only the people's robust political sense but the deep roots that democratic institutions had in Indian society.

One wishes that at this point Alam had spoken of the profound compromises made during the drafting of the Indian constitution, which he conventially refers to as a "covenant" between the ruling elite and the people. The only economic right in the Fundamental Rights was the right to property that served the propertied who were overwhelmingly represented in the Constituent Assembly. People's rights like the right to work, right to livelihood, right to leisure, right to education were in the non-justiciable Directive Principles. Speaking on November 25, 2005 just before the draft Constitution was adopted, Dr. Ambedkar warned that though the Constitution had established political equality, it had not significantly removed social and economic inequality. So the Indian Constitution is indeed a covenant, but a highly unequal one.

Alam also notes the changing structure of the middle strata, and influential segment of the Indian polity. The rise of the OBCs and their inclusion along with the dalits and adivasis in the middle class, he terms the neo-middle class. The displacement of the of the exclusionary representation that the upper castes had in the middle class by these subaltern strata is, he notes, a significant political phenomenon. This has led to the clamour for quotas by the OBCs in professional courses and government jobs as a way to consolidate their power, because unlike the upper castes they did not have the cushion of inherited assets that would insure their class position.

Alam makes a controversial point about castes. He argues that since 'jatis' today are rejecting "all the normative markers of what constitutes the varna order," they have become castes "in only a nominal sense." Castes are now communities like others. This is perhaps a bit strong. Caste operates, as it always has but more so today, as an ideology. Thus the MY [Muslim-Yadav] alliance in Bihar or in U.P. Even in Tamilnadu the tension between the thevars and dalits, are more than a community conflict but also an ideological one where one's place in the social order in based on birth, not religious or class affiliation. Even communities like the Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, have caste divisions, and their own dalits like the Sikh Mazbis. So caste has not weakened despite the weakening of the traditional varna normative order. But even today, the dwija or twice-born castes are on top of the caste hierarchy, and the brahmins retain their privileged ritual status. So caste remains a special community, more pervasive and societally more oppressive than any other.

The most important part of Indian democracy is that it has survived. As Alam notes it has followed a "path of its own." This successful experiment has also proved to be, as he points out, a refutation of the great liberal thinker John Stuart Mill who contended that universal education must precede universal suffrage. But he did not realize that in a country like India, the illiterate poor are not politically uneducated. Their life of hardship, sometimes starvation, makes them acutely aware of the ground realities of their lives, the parties responsible, and the performance of their legislators. As statistics cited in this illuminating little tract reveal, the poor vote in greater numbers than the middle class or the rich. Contra Mill, the illiterate are politically educated, not only justifying their right to vote, but using that precious vote with discretion and determination.

In his 'Epilogue' on the 2004 General Elections, Alam notes that the defeat of the BJP-led NDA is "a mark of the vibrancy of Indian democracy." So it is clear from his deceptively slim volume that in India everyone wants democracy, from the more authoritarian BJP to the equally elitist Congress. The bulwark of the democratic process are the poor and the neo-middle class representing the subaltern OBCs, dalits and adivasis.

However, the issues that could not be addressed in this tract: the legacy and unfulfilled promises of the Constitution, the impact of globalization and neo-liberal reform on the social structure and its assault on the living standards of the poor, all merit another volume in this series. It will be difficult to find as judicious and informed an author, but Alam's magisterial effort has whetted all his readers, appetite for more.■

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Shifts and Ambiguities

Aditya Nigam

WRITING POLITICS: LEFT DISCOURSES IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA
By Devesh Vijay
Popular Prakashan, 2004, pp. 245, Rs. 275.00

In many ways, the volume under review is a strange one. For one thing, it is a volume that seeks to track writings by 'Left intellectuals' in India over the last few decades – that is, precisely in the period when Left wing thinking has seen its most serious ever crisis worldwide and has become somewhat out of tune with the times. However, that is in itself no reason this important body of scholarly and political writing should not be taken seriously. Indeed an interpretative exercise analysing such writings could enable us to see the intellectual crisis of the Left in far greater depth than has been usual in quick journalistic jibes against what are now seen to be creatures of a bygone age. As the writer recognizes, "the preceding two decades have...been one such epoch in our history when Left conceptions of politics in particular came under acute strain and changed in a variety of ways" (p.vii). Given this, he claims, this book "makes an attempt to analyse the significant variations, shifts and ambiguities in applications of major analytical categories in Left discourse in Indian politics" (Ibid.).

This in itself, it should be recognized, is an important concern for then and then alone can one really hope to arrive at what is called an "immanent critique" of Left wing ideas and Left discourse in contemporary India. How an idea or a body of ideas and knowledge responds to real life situations that it is continuously forced to confront, *on its own terms and in its categories*, can best tell us – far better than any externalist reading or critique ever can – what the blind spots of that body of ideas is.

From that point of view however, it would be necessary, one would imagine, that *the entire body of writings* that began as 'Marxist' or 'Leftist' before the onset of the crisis be included in the survey: For then alone would we be able to see the extent of 'shifts and ambiguities' or 'significant variations' that defines the present of these ideas. If however, one definitionally rules out those scholars or intellectuals who have found the earlier frames inadequate and have moved away in other directions, from the purview of the analysis, then one is constrained to feel that there is a somewhat theological attitude at work here. As the author himself states, "By the term Left, we refer to all those thinkers who have accorded primacy to the ideal of social equality and the *Marxist conception of class struggles and the vision of a classless society*, explicitly or implicitly" (p.2). Now, if this were the author's intention, then the sub-title of the work should have spoken of 'Marxist' rather than 'Left' discourses in contemporary India. For, to reduce 'the Left' to all those who believe in class struggle and classless society, is to make a mockery of the entire history of the Left. We need not actually delve into the history of the Left either globally or nationally but let us just mark two distinct moments that might help to clarify our point. Take the Paris Commune of 1871 for instance. All shades of Left wing tendencies which aligned themselves with the working class, except the Marxists, strictly speaking, were in the forefront of this uprising that has become part of Marxist folklore since. The Communards were not Marxist but Leftist they certainly were. Or take for example, the New Left movement of the 1960s in Europe, which explicitly brought into public debate questions other than class, especially questions of identity, and therefore rejected a certain Marxism that had held sway till then. This was a Left wing movement no less. If the Paris Commune represents the pre-history of Marxism, the New Left was a rebellion against the institutionalized Left, among other things.

One is therefore a trifle surprised to find the author making it clear at the very outset that he will not consider scholars who may be termed 'radical', 'communitarian', or 'postmodernist' in his study – as their critique of capitalism is not made from the vantage point of class but that of culture and ethnicity (p.3). Now this is interesting because most of the scholars who would today be placed under this rubric are those who emerge from within a Marxist universe and who represent precisely the tradition of immanent critique; they are scholars who have found the earlier frames either too rigid or limited, and hence unequal to the task of understanding the explosion of identity anxieties and culture wars of the last two decades. By simply removing them from the purview of discussion and concentrating then on only those who doggedly hold on to the theology of class struggle, the author has, it seems to us, impoverished his own project. It is not that he has not occasionally referred to the writings of such apostates as say Partha Chatterjee or Sudipta Kaviraj; indeed he has but then he has freed himself from any responsibility of engaging with their ideas in any systematic way. He has, for that matter occasionally garnished the discussion of old-style Marxist writings with some quotations from liberals or liberal Leftists – no believers in class struggle certainly – like Rajeev Bhargava, or Asghar Ali Engineer, Sarah Joseph but there is no serious engagement with their thought either.

Engagement is one thing, however, that is singularly absent from the entire book. At best what we have is a synoptic view of the writings of various Marxist writers, arranged along different thematic sub-heads, in different chapters. Broadly the chapters include themes like 'Class, Economy and Social Formation', 'Culture, Ideology and Ethnicity', 'Power, State and Constitution', and 'Communalism and the Rise of Hindutva' and one chapter that looks at the larger goals like Equality, Freedom, Democracy and Decentralization etc. in the writings of these authors. Of course, in the actual course of writing, the author might have been able to write only the first and maybe the last chapters, had he taken seriously his own injunction to excise the renegades of Marxism altogether from consideration in his writing. For, the others, the believers in class struggle have had very little, beyond making sympathetic gestures, to say on other issues – those of culture, power, and ideology and in fact, even the Indian Constitution.■

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Searching for a New Paradigm

Harish Khare

TALKING NEW POLITICS: ARE OTHER WORLDS POSSIBLE?
Edited by Jai Sen and Mayuri Saini
Zubaan, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 231, Rs.195.00

For seven days in January 2004 Mumbai staged a kind of khumbh mela for the concerned and the sensitive souls. From across the world came scholars, activists, intellectuals, grassroot workers, and all others who wanted to associate themselves with an occasion that celebrated dissent. Mumbai, otherwise serenaded as India's happening place where capitalistic enterprise finds a natural expression, became host for the World Social Forum, a self-designed rival and alternative to the annual gathering of corporate tycoons and finance ministers at the World Economic Forum at Davos (Switzerland). All those who gather at the WSF mela are inspired by the faith that a world other than the one scripted by the Wall Street Mob is possible.

Rather becomingly the Indian contingent prepared itself adequately for the Mumbai mela. *Talking New Politics* documents how diligently a section of the Indian alternative-crowd motivated itself for the Mumbai show. This is a very useful account of the series of seminars held at Delhi University in the run up to the Mumbai gathering. Scholars, trade unionists, activists and researchers conducted workshops to talk about issues likely to figure at Mumbai.

In the event the Mumbai gathering produced its own sound-bytes and inspirations, and then life was back to its routine pace of compromises and concerns. Yet *Talking New Politics* turns out to be a durable collection, bringing together voices and perspectives that remain relevant because, as the editor, Jai Sen points out, the struggle goes on "for freeing people all over the world of the shackles of the colonization of the mind." These musings and meditations provide a healthy antidote to the prevailing orthodoxy of the inevitability of the globalizaton. And this orthodoxy invariably works itself out at the expense of the poor and the marginalized in every society.

Perhaps the single most consistent theme that emerges in all the concerns is the need to recognize and respect diversity. The state order stresses uniformity, compliance, homogeneity — even though it keeps chanting the "unity in diversity" mantra — and is patently uncomfortable with voices and ideas that question the establishment's preferences. The crux of the argument is adequately captured by Nivedita Menon: "The fact that diversity will generate uncontrollable, unpredictable energies is something that is frightening for any order that seeks to impose one model on the university. What has therefore happened is that the ideas of progress and development have given states their raison d'etre, have permitted governance of populations, and therefore the idea of progress. And the unitary notion of progress has actually acted as a weapon to disenfranchise the powerless and the marginalised."

Another refreshing perspective is provided by Veena Das, who invites us to think beyond the categories of violence made fashionable in the West after "9/11". Those who allow themselves to the sucked into the catechism invented in the Bush White House lose the option of "finding moral resources of non-violence, or the readiness to defend freedoms and dissent." Veena Das reminds us that if the claim of "exception" in the name of war on terror is conceded, it would lead to a daily blurring of distinction between war and peace, in which every state and every non-state actor can claim "exception" to engage in massive violence and violation of human rights. At home, L.K.Advani's efforts to put in place a POTA regime was a classic copy-cat act.

And the most hopeful note is struck by P.R. Rajagopal who pleads for a renewed faith in the power of nonviolence, which should lead to creating and enlarging the space for nonviolent action. Networking among the non-violent groups is the first step in this re-discovery. "Nonviolence should be presented as a powerful tool to make governments bow in a nonviolent way. This would promote people power instead of party politics. Through people's politics, we can put pressure on the State to act in the interest of the people, because in a globalized world the interest of the people is not the same as that of the party, or that of the State."

What is reassuring about this collection is that despite the preference for a different world, there is no suggestion of an authoritative definition of that alternative. One kind of orthodoxy is not sought to be replaced by another. It is this leit motif of intellectual openness that makes this book a useful read.■

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A Document to be Taken Note of

Mridula Mukherjee

THE COMMUNAL PROBLEM: REPORT OF THE KANPUR RIOTS ENQUIRY COMMITTEE
National Book Trust, New Delhi, 2005, pp.216, Rs.85.00

Riots broke out in Kanpur on 24 March 1931 and lasted for several days. Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi, President of the UP Provincial Congress Committee and a well-known journalist, was killed while trying to intervene in the conflict and save people in danger. The ghastly incidents sent shock-waves through the nation, especially as they took place almost at the culmination of the first phase of the Civil Disobedience movement. The Congress, at its Karachi session at the end of March 1931, set up a committee of six members to enquire into the riots, identify the causes and suggest remedies. The Committee was chaired by Bhagwan Das, one of the most eminent Indian philosophers and the secretary was Pandit Sundarlal, a distinguished non-official historian of medieval and modern India. Other members were Purushottam Das Tandon, Manzar Ali Sokhta, Abdul Latif Bijnori, and Zafarul-Mulk, all committed nationalists. The report was submitted in October 1931, but could not be published immediately as the Congress was facing heavy repression. It was published in 1933 and was immediately banned by the government.

The Report has some basic thrust areas. One, that communalism is the result of communal thinking, it is a mind-set, and once it is there, "riots can be caused almost at will by interested parties wherever and whenever it may suit them." The Kanpur riots were seen as an "aggravated symptom of the disease". The report often uses the imagery of disease and germs to describe communalism. Two, it believed that the primary cause of this communal thinking is to be found in the distorted or "perverted view of history" developed by British colonial writers and administrators in the 19th and early 20th centuries. So pervasive was this view, said the Report, that "even some of our best Congress workers, both Hindu and Muslim, are possessed with this idea", and "it is our purpose to correct this view which is generally met with in school histories"(p.xiv). "We consider, therefore, that an attempt to remove historical misconceptions is the first

...the Report contains an excellent historical survey, especially of medieval India, which I believe can even today be of great use to those who are campaigning against communalism, in the public domain or in the classroom. The first major point made in this survey is that Islam did not come to India by means of the sword, but through a variety of contacts.

and most indispensable step in the real solution of the Hindu-Muslim problem"(p.xv). Accordingly, the main part of the Report was devoted to the study of the medieval and colonial periods of Indian history, and a brief alternative reading of Indian history is presented in the report. Three, the authors of the Report dismissed the notion that religious differences were the cause of communalism. "There is nothing in their religions which makes it impossible for Hindus and Muslims to live peacefully as good neighbours and fellow-citizens." Nor were cultural differences seen as the cause. On the contrary, the report documented in great detail how a common culture had developed in the medieval period at the level of the people. Four, British colonial policies were seen as a major contributory factor. The divide and rule policy is discussed at great length. Beginning with the discrimination against Muslims following the revolt of 1857, the lag in Muslims taking to western education, the Nagari-Urdu controversy, the encouragement to Muslim elites to remain away from the Congress and the setting up of the Muslim League, culminating in the policy of separate electorates begun in 1909, but initiated in the command performance of the League delegation, all are discussed at length.

True to its promise, the Report contains an excellent historical survey, especially of medieval India, which I believe can even today be of great use to those who are campaigning against communalism, in the public domain or in the classroom. The first major point made in this survey is that Islam did not come to India by means of the sword, but through a variety of contacts. Indian contact with Arabia and Arabs and Central Asia pre-dated the birth of Islam. The western and eastern coasts of India had Arab colonies in the pre-Islamic period and therefore Islam came to India via these colonies, once Arabs became Muslims. Thus, Islam preceded Muslim political power in India, and it was not resisted by the Hindu rulers, in whose domains Muslims worked as merchants, soldiers and even generals. They fought on the side of Hindu kings against Muslim invaders. Similarly, the army of Ghazni, even before the time of Mahmud, had Hindu troops and generals. The Report concludes that "Islam was not spread by the sword of the invader but by the indigenous caste tyranny. It satisfied the social yearnings of vast sections of India's populations which were struggling to be free from that tyranny."

The Report also marshalls a large body of evidence to argue, with an uncanny contemporary resonance, against the notion that "Islam is inherently bigoted and intolerant." Pointing out that "intolerance, to some extent, seems inherent in every religious system….but history does not justify us in giving a major share of it to Islam," it argues that, "on the contrary, we find that, for its age, as a political power, Islam behaved as tolerantly as any other religion." Contrasting Islam with other faiths, especially Christianity, it points out that "when Islam emerged from Arabia and went as a conqueror to Christian territories, it was everywhere hailed as a deliverer by the Christian populations", suffering from the "relentless spirit of persecution" of Christianity.

Questioning the belief that Muslim invaders were "too barbarous and bigoted even for their age"(pp.42-3), it gives examples from across the world —of the invasion of Khurasan by the Ghuzz Turks, of England by the Danish armies, of Syria by Nawsheran the Just, a Zorastrian king of Persia, of Kalinga by Ashoka, of Spain under the Moors by the Christians—to prove that "the cruelty belonged to the age and not to individuals and religions"(p.44).

To counter another favourite communal argument, it explains why religious places are targeted by conquerors. One, "for nowhere else was the booty so plentiful and nowhere was it so easy to take". Further, and even more important, the prestige of power is shown by destroying the gods who were supposed to protect the conqueror's enemies. It gives the example of Emperor Harsha who, acting according to the custom by which the victor compelled the vanquished to surrender the most cherished idol in his principality, made the King of Kashmir part with one of the holiest Buddhist relics. After the death of Harsha, it was the turn of the Hindus to destroy Buddhist temples, and in the course of "about two centuries thousands upon thousands of Buddhist temples and monasteries, with which India teemed in the days of Buddhist glory, had all but vanished"(p.46). It points out that "no honest attempt has been made to discover how many Hindu temples were built by Muslim rulers, and how many of them received royal grants and subsidies. When such researches are made it will be found that even a king like Aurangzeb gave grants to a larger number of temples than he is credibly alleged to have destroyed"(p.54).

One of the major reasons why rulers could not indulge in religious persecution or wholesale conversion, it argues, was that Muslim kings had Hindu soldiers in large numbers and Hindu rajas had Muslim soldiers. Refuting the view that the medieval period was a contest between Islam and Hinduism, the Report says that, between the 8th and 18th centuries, the "same number of battles are fought between Muslim and Muslim and Hindu and Hindu as between Hindu and Muslim kings"(p.55).

The Report also devotes considerable attention to documenting the evolution of a common culture at the popular and elite levels in medieval India. It cites a number of interesting examples, such as how Muslim and Hindu rulers wore similar head-dress and clothes, how astrologers were patronized by the Muslim courts, how Muslims retained caste exclusiveness, how Mughal emperors sat for Jharokha Darshan every morning, and celebrated in the court Nauroz, Dassehra, Raksha-bandhan, Diwali, Shivratri, Id, and Shabi-i-barat, and how they drank only Gangajal, whether at court, camp, or at home, and that there was a whole department to ensure a regular supply, how Akbar banned cow-slaughter and Jahangir and Shahjahan followed suit, and how Akbar tried to give the ideas of the Bhakti movement a formal shape by founding a new religion, Din-i-Ilahi.

The Report concludes its historical survey with the formulation that "all the main (communal) controversies did not and could not have existed during the Muslim Period. They are all products of the British period and of British policy"(p.93).

The Report also contains a very useful chapter on 'Remedies', which shows us that at least some of the answers to the communal problem have been known to us for quite a while, but the problem has been with their application. At a time when we are debating a new legislation to help counter the danger posed by communal violence, it may profit us to revisit the wisdom of the national movement. Among the remedies suggested is that the government should announce that the officers incharge of a district, the District Magistrate and the Superintendent of Police, where communal violence takes place, shall be forthwith suspended and then allowed to submit explanation. They know the mischief-makers and they have only to take preventive action(p.157). Another suggestion is that all denominational institutions should be nationalized, and that in future no school or college bearing the name Hindu, Muslim, or Christian, be set up. The emphasis should be on promoting the evolution of a common culture, and on ideological struggle. The Congress should refuse to negotiate with communal groups as this means accepting them as true representatives of their communities. It should treat communalism as a major problem, and set up a Permanent Board, which should be outside the direct political struggle, to address it.

The National Book Trust, by making this report available to the citizens of this country at an affordable price at this crucial juncture when the ghosts of Gujarat are still to be buried, has rendered a signal service.■

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Unusual Viewpoints

Snehanshu Mukherjee

URBANIZATION AND GOVERNANCE IN INDIA
Edited by Evelin Hust, Michael Mann
A publication of the French Research Institutes in India & South Asia Institute, Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 344, Rs. 995.00

The book reviewed is a publication of the French Research Institutes in India & South Asia Institute, New Delhi. The contents of the book are therefore the work of various researchers – compiled and edited by Evelin Hust and Michael Mann, both senior scholars based in Germany. Both the editors have had a long association in conducting research in the South Asia region with a special emphasis on development issues in India. The first chapter, *Problems of Urbanization and Urban Governance in India* by Evelin Hust is well written and introduces the three sections and their contents economically. The introduction also fulfills the task of setting forth the overall premise of the book which presents the reader with a brief history of planned urban development together with the reality on the ground. This brief overview raises one's expectations of further elaboration of the many pertinent issues and themes in the body of the book. The above point can be further illustrated through the following quote from the Introduction:

> There is still a lack of proof that the private sector is always better equipped to fulfil the requirements of urban governance, especially when it comes to sustainable and equitable service delivery in a social setting that is marked by great spatial and social inequalities.

The issue raised is indeed a topical one and is capable of sparking debates in any seminar on urban issues. However the chapters that follow do not help the reader to arrive at any clear conclusions on this issue. In each of the four chapters that make up the three sections of the book, the various authors have based their papers on matter drawn from secondary sources that have already been published as books, or from research papers by other scholars. In a few of the cases the authors have written their chapters based on their own primary data collection. However, irrespective of the source of data collection, the book on the whole, barring a few of the chapters, does not bring to light any new thought or analysis on the different aspects of urban conditions or governance. The extensive referencing of sources in each of the chapters however gives the book a useful function of serving as a wonderful source book or course reader on Urban Governance.

The three sections that the contents of the book are structured under are namely: The Framework – Environment, Decentralization, Liberalization and Governmentality; Infrastructure – Technical, Social and Cultural Aspects; In Time and Space – Urban Settlements and the State.

Each of the aspects that are identified through these sections are important ones and at any time would demand original, insightful research and analysis that could point a way to the resolution of the various problems posed in the field. So though the book has been structured in a relevant way, the chapters written by the various authors do not reach a level beyond merely stating the problem, which, given the large volume of existing literature on the subject today, may be considered as common knowledge. A few of the chapters that have examined some comparatively new areas have been reviewed below.

The chapter by Ravinder Kaur entitled 'Planning Urban Chaos: State and Refugees in Post Partition Delhi' is one of the few chapters in the book that tackles questions that are not the usual. She bases her text on the memoirs of Justice G. D. Khosla as an illustration of the conditions on the ground during the refugee influx into Delhi. The memoirs are juxtaposed with office records and official letters written by refugee organizations to present a more complete picture of the conditions and the effect of government policy decisions on the ground. The decisions of that time during the pre-masterplan era have had a major bearing in shaping the development of Delhi, as we know it today. However, even in this chapter the analysis in the concluding section ends abruptly and does not reach a level beyond what is already covered in the body of the text.

The study by Maren Bellwinkel-Schempp entitled 'Pigs and Power: Urban Space and Urban Decay' is an example of an unusual viewpoint selected to understand the forces that control the use of urban space and infrastructure. The chapter traces the development of dalit power in Kanpur through the study of the fortunes of the Khatik caste tracing their rise in the 1860s to current day political conditions of Uttar Pradesh and Kanpur city in particular. The strategy of the Khatiks of letting their pigs run wild through select neighbourhoods of the city as a means of controlling territory is a unique study. Such studies help to build an understanding of commonly seen sights in most cities, like stray cattle on the streets, which is accepted as inevitable without understanding their political/social implications.

'Reflections on Urbanization in Water: Infrastructure and Local Discourse in a Town in the Making' by Bettina Weiz is an example of a study that brings to light the conflict between "modern engineered" infrastructure provision and traditional forms of the same – in this case the provision of water supply. The case study is of a small town Tirukkalukundram in Tamil Nadu, where while the provision of municipal piped water failed the water tanks that had been the traditional source of water also degenerated. The study seeks to explain the mechanics and politics behind the supply of water. The situation studied is a fairly common condition in the process of urbanization where engineering solutions aimed at improving infrastructure could actually cause a deterioration of the conditions when compared to what existed as a traditional system. A quote from the conclusions of this chapter highlights this critical issue:

> .. in both arrangements to supply water – the urban one and the less urban one – space is partitioned and subdivided, the access to resources is restricted, and groups of people are excluded. The motivations do not differ much, even though the more urban water supply system comes along with the worn-out promise of new technology to overcome social cleavages.

The relevance of the book under review therefore is limited to the contribution of a few of the authors who have addressed new areas of research and analysis, while the others have restated what has already been well documented and published in the past. The book also raises a question in the mind of this reviewer as to what could be the reasons behind the mounting interest in India's development that is generated amongst researchers from more "developed" countries. So much so that the research by Maren Bellwinkel-Schempp is funded by the Volkswagen Foundation – which one might assume is linked to the German automotive manufacturing company. We too as Indians have had this tendency to look towards the West for solutions to our problems without trying to solve them locally. As the chapter on 'Reflections on Urbanization in Water: Infrastructure and Local Discourse in a Town in the Making' discussed above shows, the problems could also be caused by this very same tendency of importing technological or operational systems that do not find their roots in our soil.■

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The Non-Rational City

A.G. Krishna Menon

REAL CITIES: MODERNITY, SPACE AND THE PHANTASMAGORIAS OF CITY LIFE
By Steve Pile
Sage Publications, London, 2005, pp. 216, £21.99

City dwellers, by and large, think of their environment in material terms: streets and traffic, buildings they live and go to work in or use for entertainment; infrastructure services (or the lack of them) that support urban living, parks and other public spaces. These are the tangible, 'rational' components of the city, whether planned or unplanned, with which they relate on a daily basis. Consequently, much of what is written about cities in planning documents and the media, refer to the city in material terms. The subject of this book however, is heterodox: it examines the 'non-rational' in modern city life. It argues that the imaginary, the fantastic, the emotional—the eponymous phantasmagoria—are equally important in defining city life and must become part of the real politics of the city.

The importance of the 'non-rational' in city planning is not as strange or unorthodox an idea as may appear in the first instance. Utopian proposals based on social and cultural imperatives have made important contributions to the development of the 'rational' city in the history of urban planning. Even an early urban theorist of the Chicago School, Robert Park, defined the city as a 'state of mind'. In fact, one of the valuable contributions of Pile's book is the extensive references the author has collated from the fields of psychology, critical theory, literature, cinema, psychogeography and sociology, which have examined the city in a 'non-rational' light. While city plans are 'rational' documents, their underlying ideas are often 'non-rational'; therefore, the 'non-rational' becomes as important as the 'rational' in evaluating city life.

We are, in fact, dealing with the 'non-rational' aspects of the city all the time. For example, we 'feel' different in Varanasi and Mumbai, and even in different parts of the same city, like Old Delhi (Shahjahanabad) and New Delhi. This difference does have something to do with the built form and infrastructure of these cities, or parts of cities—their 'rational' elements—but it is also experienced in the way people live their lives; in their culture and customs, how they treat strangers, their prejudices and indifferences, all of which constitute the 'non-rational' characteristics of urbanism. Pile's book, however, looks beyond these commonplace experiences to explore deeper emotional terrains by examining the "dreams, magic, vampires and ghosts", present in the subconscience of city-dwellers.

Pile's approach can be described as psychogeographical; it blends an appreciation of the social, physical, historical, spatial and psychological dimensions of city life into one whole. It pays attention to the minutiae of city life. To explain his approach he discusses the psychogeographies of novelist Iain Sinclair and film-maker Patrick Keiller who explore the moods and atmosphere of London. He discusses the utopianisms in the writings of Guy Debord and the Situationist International – with whom the term psychogeography is most closely associated – who describe the hidden or blatant power relations at the heart of psychogeographical practices and the need to release people's real desires and aspirations upon the world. He underpins these views through the works of G. Simmel, who at the turn of the last century wrote on the city and mental life and on how the atmospherics of city life affect peoples' feelings and social interactions.

Pile's thesis can have great relevance to the way we plan and manage our cities. He throws light on the dreams of city planners, and more importantly, on the dreams that citizens weave to inhabit urban spaces. But it may be difficult to situate his study in the kind of receptive intellectual environment where it could be put to use. His perspective derives from his disciplinary background in cultural geography, a subject that is, at best, at the periphery of urban studies in India (though it is the focus of some excellent research initiatives outside formal academia as for example, the works of Sarai, the New Media Initiative of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, and the Centre for Civil Society) and certainly nonexistent in the perception of city development authorities.

Thus, while I would like to present this book as one that has the potential to make significant contributions to the way we build and manage cities in India, I also realize that the subject could be dismissed as gibberish by the pragmatic, nuts-and-bolts variety of town planners and administrators who dominate the planning scene. It would be difficult, in any case, to make a case for studying "dreams, magic, vampires and ghosts" to improve the urban environment of Indian cities, though we are all too familiar with some strange phenomena in the recent past – citizens being terrorized by a 'monkeyman' and mesmerized by Ganesh idols drinking milk. But let me first explain what the author has to say.

Pile's arguments flow from many sources. An important one is Walter Benjamin who examined the new kind of urbanism that was emerging in cities like Paris in the wake of the transforming forces of modernism. He observed (as, for example, in his 'Arcades' project), that the perpetual movement, fervour, noise and buzz that incessantly assault the senses in the city have an effect which can be described as phantasmagoric. The city in that sense is full of phantasmagorias. According to Benjamin this experience resembles dreaming, leaving the modern city-dweller "Hypnotised. Intoxicated. Stupefied. Dreaming. Sleeping". Benjamin tried to discover what those phantasmagorias meant to the production of urban space. For him, "the real city is produced as much by ideas as machines, as much by fantasies as rational plans, as much by their psychodramas as their political economies".

Following the works of Benjamin, as well as G. Simmel and Sigmund Freud, Pile explores the phantasmagorias of modern city life in cities like New Orleans, New York, Berlin, London, Paris, Johannesburg and Singapore. He uses Freud's technique of dream-analysis to explore what he terms, the 'emotion-work' and 'space-work' that goes into the production of the phantasmagorias of modern city life. As with dreams, he finds that it is often the marginal and seemingly trivial aspects of city life that yeild the most telling information. This information – analysis of dreams – according to him, also has redemptive qualities, because, *pace* Freud, understanding them allows people to break free of the ghosts that haunt them in the present and so productively engage with the future.

Pile points out that dreaming, wish fulfillment and disappointment, anxieties and desires are fundamental aspects of both social processes and emotional dynamics that produce city life and urban space. Dreams are part of the "ordinary banal life in cities... Every day, people are confronted with dreams: dream houses with dream mortgages, dream loans for dream holidays, dream hair to go with dream lingerie, and dream books to make sense of it all". While these can be seen as products of a commodity culture, he suggests that they are also indicative of a general urban condition of unfulfilled desires – which, arguably, commodity culture preys upon. Thus cities are part of the machinery of desire – not merely wistful fancies, but "sites of the complex emotional work of real desires, personally and socially".

But how do "dreams, magic, vampires and ghosts" fit into his otherwise comprehensible argument privileging the non-rational elements of a city ? Understanding this may be difficult in the western context, but not in India. No book needs to be written to explain the modern city-dweller in India's phantasmagorias : blind faith in the *vaastu shastras* to build contemporary houses and cities; here every stone, tree or site has a story to tell about ancient myths and legends associated with them which must be respected on pain of eternal damnation; we have shamans, mystics and god-women (and men) crawling out of the crevices created by our modernizing social structure. While the appreciation of on such non-rational elements in city life – what he terms *occult spatialities* that make city spaces – is familiar in the Indian context, it can have shock-value in the West. Pile elaborates his

thesis in a long-winded examination of four 'non-rational' subjects, assigning a separate chapter to each: The *Dream* City, the *Magic* City, The *Vampire* City, and the *Ghost* City. Each chapter explores the ways in which these phantasmatic elements work to produce real city life and city spaces.

For example, referring to vampires, he says that exploring this subject gives a different meaning to the process of globalization and the resultant flow of people, goods, money and the like. "Rather than the smooth and instantaneous connection posited in the so-called network society, there is a sense of migration, flight, pursuit, evasion, dissimulation, rumour, wreckage, death, ancient money... of 'things' jumping in space and time: from Transylvania and Malaysia to Paris and London; from ancient to modern..." He shows how this produces a different kind of city than the one posited by modernity and globalization, one where heterogeneous spatialities – and – temporalities co-exist.

The message of this book is that modernity and the 'civilizing' influence of the city notwithstanding, the lived experiences of space are often determined by "dreams, magic, vampires and ghosts". These create 'occult spatialities', which take many forms and have a variety of consequences. "Thus, magic revealed the intricate occult circulations between cities: From New York to Haiti, from New Orleans to West Africa, from London to Johannesburg". By tracking these connections Pile finds that the life in the modern city is a never-ending cycle of dream-like processes that produce and reproduce cities and city life. He calls this process "slumbering modernity", which presents a real analytical problem: "how to waken the sleepwalkers and, as important, what are they to wake up to?"

He tries to resolve this conundrum by referring to David Harvey's call for a better, utopian future. In his book, *Spaces of Hope* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000) Harvey despairs at the conditions pervading contemporary American cities, particularly his hometown, Baltimore, and exhorts us to reanimate 'Utopia' as a guide to future action. In the past, others, too, have made similar suggestions; Ebenezer Howard and Le Corbusier advocated new spatial forms for cities, but their problem, according to Harvey, was that they expected spatial form to mediate social processes and create a perfect society.

Equally fallacious, according to him, were the prescriptions of Marx and Hegel who privileged utopianism of social process. Since social transformations remain endlessly open, it becomes impossible to intervene in the production of space as it already exists. Thus according to Harvey, "Utopia wastes away because, until the perfect revolution has taken place and its outcomes have been worked through, she has 'no place' to actually be". Harvey's solution underpins Pile's thesis, which is that we need to explore a new kind of utopianism: *spatio-temporal* utopianism. This utopia engages the utopianisms of spatial form and temporal process dialectically, to create the possibility of imagining the free and just city as both transformative of space–time and transformed in space–time. Visionary thought would be brought to bear on both social processes and spatial form simultaneously. The intention, then, would be to empower people to create a utopian city built of transformative physical forms and socialized forms of governance and economy. Each stage in the freeing of the city – in its form and process – would necessitate further transformation in form and process.

While it is likely that city planners in India will discount the exotic evidences of phantasmagorias that Pile documents, they should not dismiss Harvey's construct of "spatio-temporal" utopianism because it is of great relevance to planning cities in the Indian context. India's experiments in urbanism and modernism have created a multiplicity of competing spatial orders. This has accentuated the gap between the dreams of urban planners and the dreams of the people for whom the plans are made. Planning and managing cities on the basis of *spatio-temporal* utopianism can lessen this gap.■

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The Market and Society

Nasir Tyabji

INDIA'S MARKET SOCIETY: THREE ESSAYS IN POLITICAL ECONOMY
By Barbara Harriss-White
Three Essays Collective, Gurgaon, 2005, pp. xiv+238, Rs. 250.00

WORKERS IN THE INFORMAL SECTOR: STUDIES IN LABOUR HISTORY 1800-2000
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The market society, Polanyi's expressive term, is the explicit focus of Barbara Harriss-White's essays while the pieces in the Bhattacharya and Lucassen book, in examining the social implications of the (formally) unregulated sector of the labour market also deal with the societal implications of the market. It is this common theme that enables a single review of two books with apparently unrelated concerns to be attempted.

The 2004 elections have brought the question of the state back in, as witnessed by the Common Minimum Programme of the UPA Government. For the previous 15 odd years, the officially proclaimed philosophy had been that the state would no longer have a role to play in the further evolution of the Indian society and economy. Actually, as is well known, no market economy can function without the presence of state intervention, and what the dominant ideology prevalent between 1991 and 2004 effectively proclaimed was that the state would not intervene except precisely to further the interests of market operations. It is the notion of a compassionate state that the CMP has, haltingly, brought back into focus.

Barbara Harriss-White's essays are novel in that they deal, both theoretically and empirically, with non-state institutions, which according to her are as much critical to the functioning of India's market economy, as is the state. These institutions are that of caste and of religion and in effect, transform or rather mediate between the market economy and the market society. In other words, her two empirical essays interpret the economy-moulding characteristics of these quintessentially sociological institutions, as traditionally conceived.

The first of the essays surveys existing characterizations of the market, romantic conceptions as she terms them, though they can more precisely be termed ideological constructs through which neo liberal economic prescriptions gain their seemingly self-evident appeal. These conceptions are at a level of abstraction that would otherwise be viewed as absurdly distanced from the real life processes of exchange. What prevent them from being comical are the grim results that their applications in practice bring out, farmers' suicides, worsening conditions of work and the like. For her analysis of the real markets, Harriss-White focuses on agrarian markets, the "... provisioning systems that are the material foundations of societies of one billion people." Concretely, these markets are those of land, labour and agricultural commodities. What distinguishes her characterization of these markets from the familiar ones of neo classical economics is the way in which the elemental players in these markets are conceived, in addition to the structure of the markets themselves. She points out that markets embody processes of physical transformation, and of transfers of property rights. The firms that participate in markets are varied, both because of the functions performed by the firm and, crucially, by their financial and social hold over production. How is this characterization different to the familiar and well-analysed problem of interlocking markets? Harriss-White suggests the difference in her elaboration of the firms that engage in markets. In peasant economies, most of these firms are family firms and these, as she suggests, cannot reproduce themselves without the reproduction of the owning family. This latter system of reproduction incorporates patriarchal structures, in turn, and the entire interlocking system cannot be disaggregated and held suspended in time in the way the theory underlying interlocking markets would prescribe as the precondition for its applicability.

The second essay, subtitled 'Civil Society and Accumulation in Small Town India' is the most successful of the three in elucidating the conception of the market society. Based on three sets of data collected from Arni, in Northern Tamil Nadu, the essay considers the process of capital accumulation on the basis of business histories of commercial firms in the town. The institutions through which caste impacts on the economy are disaggregated by Harris-White into the social (caste associations), the economic (commodity associations, groupings of capital and workers), gender in the form of philanthropic bodies, local organizations concerned with urban welfare and, finally, political parties. Capital accumulation is itself supported by a corporatized regime of social institutions whose most critical purpose is to limit and deflect class conflict. This is well illustrated by the case of the bus transport industry. Operating through a cartelized trade association, self regulating procedures, often at a tangent to or even opposed to state mandated laws are enforced by the association. Actually, self regulating is a misnomer, for the norms are laid down and enforced through threats extending to physical violence, and the very right to participate in the industry.

The third essay examines the role of religion in the process of capital accumulation. It is, self confessedly, a "journey of reconnaissance". Based on secondary data, the essay is relatively disappointing, offering little new to those who have followed the history of India's troubled recent past. As the data available from secondary sources is generally assembled either to explain the economic basis for the eruption of periods of high tension and physical violence between religious communities, or in the course of investigations into the economic dimensions of particular communities, a certain amount of essentialism is inevitable. There is something troubling when caste Hindu aversion to occupations viewed as defiling is advanced as an explanation for the continuing domination of Muslims in the leather tanning industry. It is, of course, difficult to extract the real process of causation of phenomena associated with the behaviour and economic success of members of communities defined by religion based on secondary data, but certainly the results presented here leave the reader with a sense of uneasiness.

The Bhattacharya and Lucassen book contains an Introduction by the editors, a conceptual note by Marcel van der Linden and seven additional essays, of which five deal with India. Of the two that do not deal with India, the one by Janet MacGaffey on the 'Economy of Favours' in the ex Belgian Congo is of particular interest. Firstly, unlike the other papers, the essay deals with what in India would be known as the black economy, recalling Keith Hart's original conception of the informal sector as comprising all means of income generation outside the wage and salary sector. As MacGaffey points out, people from all strata of society participate in the "second economy" whether to survive, improve conditions of their lives or to amass (not necessarily through a process of capital accumulation) huge amounts of wealth, This essay, then, complements those in Harriss-White's book, by detailing some of the features of a market society whereby those who are not part of the accumulation process manage to secure a livelihood. As she writes,

> In this (unofficial) economy 'Who you know' has become critical for making one's living. Access through personal connections to persons who control resources or transportation, work in office posts or customs, or are connected to the powerful, is the critical resource. People who lack control over allocation of resources may be able to use material resources that they do control to engage in these informal exchanges. It is through networks of such connections, in which people exchange direct or indirect favours, that society and economy function.

MacGaffey raises the question of why those favoured with incomes in the form of regular though miniscule wages and salaries prefer to retain such jobs. She argues that through the jobs that they hold, wage and salary receivers are able to access goods and services that do not have to be paid

for and also to access other resources that increase still further their money making capacity. The familiarity of these situations demonstrates that though MacGaffey's essay is rather impressionistic and anecdotal, it contains the elements of important generalizations.

Of the other essays in the book, Carlos Aguirre suggests the need to bring the history of crime and labour history in juxtaposition so that both may benefit. Two other essays, by Chitra Joshi and Jan Bremen examine the effects of deindustrialization in India and its contribution to the growth of the informal sector. Prabhu Mahapatra describes the early history of the legal development of the framework of industrial relations, while Voravidh Charoenloet analyses the impact of globalization on the informal sector in Thailand. Finally, Dilip Simeon discusses some aspects of the relationship between the phenomenon of informal labour and questions whether there had ever been a secular decline in the prevalence of informal labour as postulated by modernization theory.

Together, these two books provide pointers to how the features of economies such as India might be analysed if characteristics treated usually as marginal to long term processes of growth are brought to the center of attention. Both deserve careful reading.■

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Heterodox Economic Legacies

Praveen Jha

THE ORIGINS OF DEVELOPMENT ECONOMICS
Edited by K.S. Jomo and Erik S. Reinert
Tulika Books and Zed Books, 2005, pp xxii+165, Rs. 400.00

THE PIONEERS OF DEVELOPMENT ECONOMICS
Edited by K.S. Jomo
Tulika Books and Zed Books, 2005, pp xiii+234, Rs. 500.00

Although mainstream economists would hate to acknowledge it, much of what they practise in the name of development economics is short on substance, however elegant it may appear in form. Typically, the fare dished out by them is a body of arguments and ideas rooted in the standard microeconomic theory, which has been subjected to severe criticism over several decades now, and justifiably so, for its ahistoricity, methodological individualism and on a host of other grounds. But the loyal members of the aforementioned tribe seems to be unfazed by such critical scrutinies; they not only swear by the proverbial clothes of the Emperor but often celebrate it. Furthermore, given the stranglehold of the mainstream on the profession at the current juncture, it is really unfortunate that the students in most universities are hardly exposed to the substantive richness of the alternative approaches towards engaging with the central concerns of development economics. In fact, it is a pity that even the body of thought that came to be identified as a sub-discipline in the post-war period in the name of development economics, which was largely structured around very significant contributions from among the dissenters within the mainstream tradition itself, has been marginalized in the recent years. As it happens, texts carrying titles such as 'Development Micro Economics' strut gleefully on the upmarket shelves of the high fashion street in the profession today.

Given such a backdrop, the two books under review here, (which are part of a trilogy), are of immense value. These remind the readers that the current phase of the neoliberal economic orthodoxy, with a touching faith in the dictum that the 'market-knows-and-does-the-best', may well be an exceptional juncture when viewed in a longer-term perspective. The first of these two volumes attempts to capture the rich and long tradition of thinking on economic transformation and progress from pre-Smithian times to the classical development economics of the post-World War II era. Through this broad sweep it shows the wealth of insights which are typically ignored by the contemporary mainstream economists, partly on account of their quest for ever-superior formalism and partly due to ideology masquerading as epistemology. Furthermore, as this survey shows, there is a remarkable continuity of ideas and arguments, along alternative tracks, in this long journey. Thus, as the editors put it: 'There are no paradigm shifts in the Kuhnian sense but, rather, parallel streams, often at different levels of abstraction, which compete for the attention of economists and policy-makers. When similar economic situations reappear—even centuries apart—similar approaches tend to be reinvented, with or without reference to previous theories addressing similar problems. Periods of profound understanding alternate with periods dominated by abstract theories, as knowledge previously recognized as valuable becomes devalued. ... since the 1760s, two different approaches—or parallel streams—to economics have competed for attention and prominence. Sometimes one dominates, while at other times the two streams are seen as complementary and theoretical pluralism is seen as natural. During such times of pluralism, the economist's toolbox is at its largest' (p vii).

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MacGaffey raises the question of why those favoured with incomes in the form of regular though miniscule wages and salaries prefer to retain such jobs. She argues that through the jobs that they hold, wage and salary receivers are able to access goods and services that do not have to be paid

for and also to access other resources that increase still further their money making capacity. The familiarity of these situations demonstrates that though MacGaffey's essay is rather impressionistic and anecdotal, it contains the elements of important generalizations.

Of the other essays in the book, Carlos Aguirre suggests the need to bring the history of crime and labour history in juxtaposition so that both may benefit. Two other essays, by Chitra Joshi and Jan Bremen examine the effects of deindustrialization in India and its contribution to the growth of the informal sector. Prabhu Mahapatra describes the early history of the legal development of the framework of industrial relations, while Voravidh Charoenloet analyses the impact of globalization on the informal sector in Thailand. Finally, Dilip Simeon discusses some aspects of the relationship between the phenomenon of informal labour and questions whether there had ever been a secular decline in the prevalence of informal labour as postulated by modernization theory.

Together, these two books provide pointers to how the features of economies such as India might be analysed if characteristics treated usually as marginal to long term processes of growth are brought to the center of attention. Both deserve careful reading.■

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Heterodox Economic Legacies

Praveen Jha

THE ORIGINS OF DEVELOPMENT ECONOMICS
Edited by K.S. Jomo and Erik S. Reinert
Tulika Books and Zed Books, 2005, pp xxii+165, Rs. 400.00

THE PIONEERS OF DEVELOPMENT ECONOMICS
Edited by K.S. Jomo
Tulika Books and Zed Books, 2005, pp xiii+234, Rs. 500.00

Although mainstream economists would hate to acknowledge it, much of what they practise in the name of development economics is short on substance, however elegant it may appear in form. Typically, the fare dished out by them is a body of arguments and ideas rooted in the standard microeconomic theory, which has been subjected to severe criticism over several decades now, and justifiably so, for its ahistoricity, methodological individualism and on a host of other grounds. But the loyal members of the aforementioned tribe seems to be unfazed by such critical scrutinies; they not only swear by the proverbial clothes of the Emperor but often celebrate it. Furthermore, given the stranglehold of the mainstream on the profession at the current juncture, it is really unfortunate that the students in most universities are hardly exposed to the substantive richness of the alternative approaches towards engaging with the central concerns of development economics. In fact, it is a pity that even the body of thought that came to be identified as a sub-discipline in the post-war period in the name of development economics, which was largely structured around very significant contributions from among the dissenters within the mainstream tradition itself, has been marginalized in the recent years. As it happens, texts carrying titles such as 'Development Micro Economics' strut gleefully on the upmarket shelves of the high fashion street in the profession today.

Given such a backdrop, the two books under review here, (which are part of a trilogy), are of immense value. These remind the readers that the current phase of the neoliberal economic orthodoxy, with a touching faith in the dictum that the 'market-knows-and-does-the-best', may well be an exceptional juncture when viewed in a longer-term perspective. The first of these two volumes attempts to capture the rich and long tradition of thinking on economic transformation and progress from pre-Smithian times to the classical development economics of the post-World War II era. Through this broad sweep it shows the wealth of insights which are typically ignored by the contemporary mainstream economists, partly on account of their quest for ever-superior formalism and partly due to ideology masquerading as epistemology. Furthermore, as this survey shows, there is a remarkable continuity of ideas and arguments, along alternative tracks, in this long journey. Thus, as the editors put it: 'There are no paradigm shifts in the Kuhnian sense but, rather, parallel streams, often at different levels of abstraction, which compete for the attention of economists and policy-makers. When similar economic situations reappear—even centuries apart —similar approaches tend to be reinvented, with or without reference to previous theories addressing similar problems. Periods of profound understanding alternate with periods dominated by abstract theories, as knowledge previously recognized as valuable becomes devalued. ... since the 1760s, two different approaches—or parallel streams—to economics have competed for attention and prominence. Sometimes one dominates, while at other times the two streams are seen as complementary and theoretical pluralism is seen as natural. During such times of pluralism, the economist's toolbox is at its largest' (p vii).

...both these volumes provide a fascinating mirror to a most impressive range of the heterodox economic legacies, and ought to be read by those interested in economics of development.

Sure enough, depending on the level of generality, among other things, one may quibble over the number and the range of alternative approaches, their points of overlap as well as irreconciliable differences etc., as historians of economic thought keep reminding us all the time; however, the important point is, and this volume reiterates it further with much clarity and force, that one must reject the depiction of the history of economic ideas as being on any unique trajectory of evolution from a primitive pathway to a super highway, as some of the greatest names amongst economists, such as Paul Samuelson and John Hicks, would have us believe. Such a depiction only trivializes the great intellectual legacy of the discipline.

Given the richness and variety of the discourses on economic development, obviously any survey would necessarily be selective, but the editors of the volume have made a judicious choice as justifiable as any other. The volume is organized in accordance with the principles of chronology as well as thematic treatments from the more general to the specific. After an excellent introduction, the initial chapters by Erik and Sophus Reinert provide fascinating accounts of mercantilism, the Italian tradition of Political Economy, and the German economic tradition from the early seventeenth century to World War II. These incisive essays bring out the central importance of creating conditions for, and specific areas of, increasing returns in successful economic transformations and progress, and the active role of the state in these respects. Mushtaq Husain's contribution titled 'The Capitalist Transformation' explores the significance of the appropriate social and institutional structures, which obviously cannot be generalized for all countries and stages of development. As the author argues persuasively, successful latecomers to capitalist transformation, such as South Korea and Taiwan, required a range of interventions and institutions quite different from those required by the classical capitalism. Again, the centrality of the state in creating suitable institutions and strategies are highlighted by the author. Jaime Ros, in his contribution titled 'The Pioneers of Development Economics and Modern Growth Theory', makes a comparative assessment of the explanatory value of the recent mainstream approaches to those of the classical development economics, particularly the writings of Rosenstein-Rodan, Nurkse and Arthur Lewis; the author pronounces an unequivocal judgment on the analytical superiority of the latter.

The chapter by Amitav K. Dutt focuses on the contributions by the early development economists, particularly Gunnar Myrdal, as regards the role of international trade and related issues, and argues that the fine start provided by them have been lost sight of by the mainstream. The essay by Alfredo Saad-Filho, assesses the claims as well as the limitations of the two very influential theories of development and underdevelopment of the post World War II era, namely, structuralism and dependency theory. In the last essay in this volume, Tamas Szentes discusses the idea of development, and the sources as well as the conditions and factors that promote it in the history of economics. In this brief survey, he provides an insightful account of the relevant major schools of economics that are prior to the coming into being of the sub-discipline in the name of 'Development Economics' after World War II.

In a nutshell, this volume achieves its intended objective extremely well, drawing on almost five centuries of the history of economic thought, to highlight the continuity of ideas and approaches towards development, and the relevance of a great deal of wisdom with respect to these, which stand marginalized at the present juncture. Consequences of such a marginalization and the related ascendancy of neoliberalism for well over two decades have had horrendous consequences for large segments of the world's population. However, for reasons of space, it is not possible to pursue here what one of the dissenting mainstream economists, Joseph Stiglitz, views as untold suffering and discontent due to neoliberalism.

The second volume under review here builds further on the territory mapped by the first, by engaging with some of the major contributors, including a few not recognized, in usual discourses, as 'pioneers' of development economics. Thus one gets a glimpse of a somewhat unconventional range of heterodoxy, including William Petty, David Ricardo, Friedrich List, Karl Marx, V.I. Lenin, Alfred Marshall, Karl Polanyi, John Maynard Keynes, Michal Kalecki, Nicholar Kaldor, Alexander Gerschenkron, Arthur Lewis, Raul Prebisch and Hans Singer. It is rare for such a spectrum to be put under the same covers.

The contributions to this volume, along with reflecting on the thoughts of the above noted pioneers, deepens our understanding of the policy debates of the past and the present in important ways. In the opening chapter, Prabhat Patnaik, after a brief sketch of the scope and purpose of development economics, closely interrogates the theoretical frameworks and methodologies that fail to consider the interactions between capitalist and non-capitalist sectors, and the wide-ranging negative implications for not doing so. The next couple of chapters by Hugh Goodacre and Utsa Patnaik are sharp reflections on the writings of William Petty and David Ricardo, to underscore the subservience of some of their thoughts to the needs of colonialism. The essay by Mehdi Shafaeddin highlights the issue of appropriate strategies to capitalist development, drawing on the writings and ideas of the German economist Friedrich List and the US Treasury Secretary Alexander Hamilton, the mid-nineteenth-century German and American economies being the obvious reference cases. The subsequent chapter by Prabhat Patnaik analyses, in a most insightful manner, several of Karl Marx's outstanding contributions to the understanding of capitalist development. This is followed by another excellent chapter by Utsa Patnaik, assessing Vladimir Ilyich Lenin's perceptive analysis of the development of capitalism in Russia at the end of the nineteenth century, and some of its implications for analysing agrarian questions in contemporary developing country contexts.

Renee Prendergast's chapter on Alfred Marshall shows that his world view was rooted in the late Victorian and evolutionary idea of progress; however, she argues that the limiting equilibrium framework and the marginalist analysis adopted by Marshall seriously constrained his evolutionary view of the economy and development. The subsequent chapter by Jayati Ghosh provides an excellent synoptic view of Michal Kalecki's economics of development; as she shows, Kalecki's contributions cover a very wide range, and remain immensely valuable today as well, both in terms of approach as well as the specific ideas. In the next chapter, John Toye engages with the legend and the legacy of John Maynard Keynes to assess his significance for development economics, and we get a most fascinating account, including, what some may perceive as heretical elements. Keynes is picked up again, along with Kaldor, in the next chapter, for their contributions to development economics, by Amiya K. Bagchi. The focus of the paper is on the specifics of the macroeconomic frameworks shared by these important economists and their relevance in the contemporary context. The next chapter by Kari Polanyi Levitt, attempts to highlight the significant implications of her illustrious father's diverse contributions.

The following chapter by C.P. Chandrasekhar underscores Alexander Gerschenkron's novel insights from his study of economic history for development policy, in particular, the need for a developmental state capable of strategic interventions to address the needs of late industrialization. The next chapter on the contributions of Raul Prebisch and W. Arthur Lewis, by Kari Polanyi Levitt, highlights their strong advocacy for industrialization for the late comers to economic transformation. Finally the last chapter, by Kunibert Raffer, draws on the writings of another of the well-known pioneers, Hans Singer, highlighting in particular, his strong and consistent advocacy for justice.

In sum, both these volumes provide a fascinating mirror to a most impressive range of the heterodox economic legacies, and ought to be read by those interested in economics of development. In particular, those impressed by the policy prescriptions of the neoliberal orthodoxy would benefit immensely by a perusal of these studies.■

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In the Context of Globalization

Shakti Kak

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVE
Edited by Guljit K. Arora and Arunabh Talwar
Research and Publishing House in association with Human Development Research Centre, New Delhi, 2005, pp. xvii+348, Rs. 485.00

In the last two decades, it has been observed that the rise in wealth and trade at the global level has been accompanied by increase in poverty and lack of access to resources and opportunities for the majority. Developments in science and technology as well as intensified use of natural resources have led to a lopsided global order. A small number of nations and individuals have become extremely wealthy while the majority of the nations and people continue to live in abject poverty and deprivation. The quality of life achieved by the developed countries appears to be an impossible goal for the poor countries. In fact, it is this realization that has made the concept of sustainable development (SD) relevant not only for economic reasons but also for social reasons. It is argued that the process of development should be such that it benefits all segments of population – this is particularly crucial for India where caste, class and gender have led to divisions in society over a long period. It is in this context that the present volume is a useful addition to the literature on sustainable development, which takes note of various dimensions like trade, environment, gender and political and social institutions.

The volume under review is a collection of invited papers on sustainable development in the context of globalization and increasing consumerism. The concept of sustainable development is generally defined in relation to environment though scholars like to use a wider definition to include economic and social aspects that provide sustainability to the development process. The World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987 defined sustainable development in terms of 'meeting needs of the present generation without compromising the needs of the future generations' (p.3). An inclusive definition of sustainable development should include the fulfilment of basic needs, a good quality of environment, natural resources as common heritage, needs of the future generations to be taken into account, along with issues like poverty, urbanization, rural development, technology, social and institutional framework of the country. It is extremely important to take note of the global inequalities in terms of access to resources to be able to discuss the possibility of sustainable development.

The book is divided into six sections. This review is based on the sections with specific references to papers. Section 1 contains papers related to globalization, global governance, global health and international trade. The editors maintain in their article that sustainable development has become a difficult task to achieve by the developing countries in view of discriminatory policies against such countries. They maintain that SD is only possible if there are 'equal opportunities for all' with sustainable livelihood and employment, gender equality and reduction in 'disparities between countries and people' (p. 27). These disparities are highly visible in terms of access to health, education and other basic necessities of life as brought out by Talwar, Ahluwalia and Jain in their articles. 'Improvements in health are not shared equally by everyone. The gap between the developed and developing world is widening' (p. 33). Poor environment leads to preventable diseases like, amongst others, malaria, schistosomiasis, chronic respiratory diseases and various childhood infections (p.36). The authors point out that in India nearly two million children under the age of five are killed every year due to diarrhoeal diseases, more than one third of women are undernourished and 47% of young children are underweight (p. 41) Sustainable development, therefore, cannot be realized till these issues are tackled.

Another issue important for equitable and sustained development is that of international trade and transfer of technology as pointed out by Sandeep Singh and Rajeev Kher. Developed countries very rarely provide the developing countries with the state of the art technology. Most often, the trade in capital equipment and other machinery is limited to the transfer of obsolete and old technology. There is also trade in second hand goods that are non-functional, polluting and outdated. Developed countries find it economical to transfer/export such waste to poor countries where environmental laws are not strictly followed (p. 55). In such situations, the perceived economic gains are far less than the negative consequences to the environment in the importing countries. T.R. Manoharan brings out the fact that India does not have stringent controls for environmental audit which has led to campaigns against imports from India. Sachin Chaturvedi argues that the development and use of cleaner technologies can be facilitated by various measures like cash incentives to the poor countries (p.71). Rajiv Ahuja and Jayati Srivastava bring out the negative impact of trade embargoes and the limited potential of dispute settlement body of the World Trade Organization. Sachidanand Sinha emphasizes the role of civil society and the negative influence of unfettered market forces. Rajesh Verma questions the argument that free trade leads to equalizing of wages across the world. He argues that unregulated trade will lead to adverse impact on employment, domestic product diversity and loss of small businesses.

Section 2 has two concept papers. Sanjit Dhami and Ali al-Nowaih discuss alternative concepts in environmental economics and Parshotam Dass studies the role of management in developing such practices which would promote sustainable development in a country. Section 3 has three papers from the perspective of economic development—by R.C. Malhan, T.P. Sinha and Vineeta Sharma which emphasize that the process of development should be inclusive and the government has to play a pro-active role in this process. Section 4 contains five articles on sustainable development and law, psychology and religion. M.C. Garg and K.C. Tuli discuss the legal and psychological aspects of sustainable development. The other three articles in this section deal with Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism in relation to sustainable development. Satyananda Shastri suggests that the 'Vedic way of life' would lead to sustainable development. It appears to hark back to times which we don't know much about and which cannot be relived. Mohammad Aslam argues that it was concepts like usury introduced by the western world (or Christians) and the industrial revolution that created negative trends in economic and social life of societies. J.S. Khanpuri has brought out the compatibility of man and nature in the Sikh religion. These papers are very brief and do not critique the religious systems which are exploitative and degrade environment.

Issues like bio-diversity, bio-technology, agriculture, water, transportation, tourism and population are discussed in Section 5 which has nine articles. Anita Chaudhary, Jai Prakash, V.P.Jain, D.M. Diwakar and C.S. Pant have written interesting articles on water, transport, population and tourism. All these articles discuss various issues highly relevant to sustainable development. The excessive use of fertilizers and pesticides and tubewell irrigation in agriculture in Punjab has led to fall in water level, soil degradation and negative results as brought out by Rajesh Jalota et al. in their paper on Punjab. J.B. Singh, Ritu Khanna and Sukarma Thareja highlight the need for ecological balance and environmental rights to further the concept of sustainable developmnt.

Section 6 on decentralization and people's participation has six articles and a write up by the editors on the future outlook. Madhu Prasad argues that a wide range of strategies need to be formulated to evolve a holistic concept of 'sustainability' for development which is linked to choice and participation of the people in the process of development. Madhu Bala and Mahi Pal write about the need for a national policy on Resettlement and Rehabilitation as well as for a decentralized institutional framework. Krishnakumar discusses the possibilities of developing innovative programmes for popular participation. Sushma and Tosh Pratima talk about the need for raising national green school cadets and introduction of environment education. This would further strengthen the idea of sustainable development as brought out by Anita in her article on education for women, literacy programmes and employment opportunities.

The volume is full of interesting articles of varied length and scholarship. The reading of the book is marred by editorial and proofing errors in several pages.■

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India and the Structural Adjustment Package

K.L. Krishna

GLOBALISATION: INDIA'S ADJUSTMENT EXPERIENCE
By Biplab Dasgupta
Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 283, Rs. 350.00

The book, while providing a well-reasoned critique of the New Economic Policy (NEP) introduced in 1991 for different sectors of the Indian economy, discusses relevant historical developments in many places, refers to the earlier literature and draws upon the author's own papers published since 1971.

The author of the book, Biplab Dasgupta, whose untimely death a few months ago has caused a big void, was an erudite scholar, respected teacher and affable parliamentarian with staunch Leftist leanings. After the introduction of the New Economic Policy (NEP)/ Structural Adjustment Package (SAP) in India in 1991, he undertook a painstaking and comprehensive analysis of the theoretical underpinnings of SAP implemented worldwide since 1980 and of the actual performance in several countries located in three continents, Africa, Latin America and Asia, and brought out in 1998 the book *Structural Adjustment, Global Trade and the New Political Economy of Development.*

The book under review is a sequel to the 1998 book and he makes frequent references to it. The new book deals with the developments in regard to globalization since 1998 and focuses on the Indian experience with SAP, especially during the rule of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) covering the period 1998-2004. The adverse consequences for the developing countries of the domination of the World Trade Organization (WTO) by rich countries since its establishment in 1995 are highlighted in several chapters of the book. The author was one of the three members of the Indian Parliament who along with the minister formed the core of the Indian delegation to the Seattle WTO Conference in 1999 and obtained firsthand knowledge of the partisan attitude and conduct of the rich countries and the relative helplessness of the developing countries at the WTO meeting. The views and insights of the author narrated in the book in regard to the WTO and several aspects of SAP make useful reading.

The book, while providing a well-reasoned critique of the New Economic Policy (NEP) introduced in 1991 for different sectors of the Indian economy, discusses relevant historical developments in many places, refers to the earlier literature and draws upon the author's own papers published since 1971. It is indeed a scholarly piece.

Apart from the introductory chapter, the book consists of three parts. The first part (chapter 2 to 5) deals with the roles of the multilateral agencies (World Bank, IMF and WTO), multinational companies (MNCs) as well as with the patent policies and environment policies prescribed by the WTO. In the second part (chapters 6 to 12), the new economic policy in India in respect of agriculture, industry, monetary and financial institutions, fiscal balance, foreign trade and capital account convertibility, public sector and labour market is critiqued. The third part of the book contains an extensive and useful bibliography on globalization and SAP.

The first chapter provides a good introduction to all the issues discussed in the subsequent chapters. The background to the macro-economic crisis of 1990-91, the structural adjustment package introduced by Manmohan Singh in 1991, the prescriptions of the WTO, the salient features of the Ninth and Tenth Five Year Plans have been outlined. The author notes that the United Front government comprising a coalition of secular and regional parties with some Left wing participation, during 1996-98, as well as the BJP-led NDA government, during 1998-2004, continued the reform process and supported globalization. He highlights the fact that liberalization, privatization and globalization (LPG) are the three components of the New Political Economy (NPE).

Dasgupta is not impressed by the overall achievements of the new economic policy. The growth performance of the 1980s has not been bettered in the 1990s. The interests of the weaker sections have been somewhat neglected under the SAP. He recommends the implementation of land reforms, development of cooperatives, and grass-root level representative institutions, enhanced investment in health and education, and a positive approach towards export promotion without abandoning the import substitution strategy.

We shall now outline the major highlights of the different chapters. The character of the WTO, its rules and procedures are described in chapter 2. The implications of WTO for India are also discussed, and attention is drawn to the adverse consequences of the WTO decisions and to the imperativeness of taking full advantage of the provisions of the WTO to mitigate these consequences.

In chapter 3, it is argued that the activities of the MNCs are detrimental to the interests of the Indian companies. Their profit motive has proved harmful to India's agriculture and environment. Patent policies in the wake of WTO are covered in chapter 4. Under the TRIPS (trade related intellectual property rights) agreement, the distinction between 'product' patent and 'process' patent was abolished with adverse consequences for Indian pharmaceutical companies which could earlier manufacture medicines at lower cost by buying a "process".

In chapter 5, it is shown that industrial interests in rich countries have used environment standard—a set of rules universally applicable to all countries—to keep away Third World exports. The author suggests that Indian authorities should list all the Indian products so that these cannot be subjected to biopiracy.

The WTO rules relating to the reduction of agricultural subsidies have favoured the rich countries enjoying a high scale of subsidies.

The major issue discussed in chapter 9 is the Fiscal Responsibility Bill of the Government of India. The bill is in conformity with article 292 of the Indian Constitution. It was passed by the Lok Sabha in 2000 and the Rajya Sabha in 2003. Dasgupta feels that the bill would greatly reduce the flexibility in dealing with financial emergencies.

Capital account convertibility is the ultimate test of global integration, according to the World Bank and the IMF. The progress in India in this regard is covered in chapter 10.

Labour market reform is discussed in the final chapter 12. The main elements of the NPE which is the philosophical basis of SAP are critiqued briefly. The author strongly disagrees with the premises and policy prescriptions of the NPE. He refers to the repressive labour policies pursued in East Asian countries. A vigorous public sector and an interventionist state as well as low wages contributes to the creation of a comparative advantage in high quality industrial goods in these countries, so that the role of the state in East Asian success is a major factor.

This last book by Biplab Dasgupta has dealt admirably with a wide range of issues related to globalization and structural adjustment policies with particular reference to India in the post-1991 era.

There is scope for further analysis of the important themes covered in the book using suitable data sets and drawing upon the results of other scholars. It is hoped that some younger person will take up this task in the near future.■

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So, Who Gets to Fund Research on Malaria?

Madhumita Chakraborty

THE WTO AND INDIA'S PHARMACEUTICALS INDUSTRY: PATENT PROTECTION, TRIPS AND DEVELOPING COUNTRIES
By Sudip Chaudhuri
Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2005, pp. 358, Rs. 650.00

The Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) have inspired close to 300 tomes and treatises since the agreement among the signatories of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) came into effect in 1995.

The last word is not out yet, as the true implications of the patents and copyright regimes in developing nations (that are implementing TRIPS this year), bound to provoke more fencing among the contrarians, better known as "economists", around the world. So far TRIPS has inspired diatribes as diverse as the scathing critique by the Professors Peter Drahos and John Braithwaite ('Information Feudalism – Who Owns the Knowledge Economy') who said that the patents regime had only bred a new kind of feudalism, "the beneficiary of which are the rich", to those advocating an end to the "free ride" of the developing world on the innovations of the Rich. (After all, the bulk of the patents are owned by multinationals, who could scarcely make a dole of their R&D investments.)

Sudip Chaudhuri prefers to wade through a sequestered segment of the debate, rather than plunge into the turbulent mid stream of trade conundrums with ethical connotations. The professor of economics at the Indian Institute of Management Calcutta attempts a bird's eye view of the implications of TRIPS on the drug industry in India in *The WTO And India's Pharmaceuticals Industry: Patent Protection, TRIPS, and Developing Countries*. Even in that cloister of India-centric commentaries on TRIPS though, other efforts exist, like Rishi Gupta's *TRIPS compliance: Dealing with the Consequences of Drug Patents in India*.The Thomson Gale publication of March 2004, was in reality a reprint of the author's article in the *Houston Journal of International Law*. It touched on most of the sensitive aspects of the product patents regime, like '*Will Drug Prices Actually Rise*?' and the compulsory licensing provisions that allow patented drugs to be available in markets in which the originators of patent are not present.

Chaudhuri's edge over such treatises stems from the fact that his book hit the market less than five months after product patents were reinstated by an amendment in the Patents Act of 1970. The Patents Act 2005 came into effect in April and Professor Chaudhuri has managed to incorporate the new Act and its implications for the Indian pharmaceutical industry before his publishers could send the manuscript to press. The author journeys through the history of the pharmaceutical industry in India. He begins with the British Patents and Design Act of 1911, which acknowledged product patents for pharmaceuticals and food.

Chaudhuri then tells us how the Patents Act of 1970 encouraged home-grown drug firms to innovate by restricting patents to manufacturing processes. The process patent regime not only spawned a huge brood of Indian pharmaceutical enterprises, some of which like Cipla, Ranbaxy and Nicholas Piramal are transnationals today, but also helped bring down drug prices in India by keeping competition alive. "It is important to note that before the introduction of TRIPS, about forty-seven other countries did not provide product patent protection in pharmaceuticals..." the author points out, to underscore the "entrepreneurial spirit" that makes the Indian pharmaceutical industry different.

Countries like Ghana, Iran, Iraq, Malawi, Pakistan, Uruguay, and Vietnam did not seem to have "the entrepreneurial and technological skills to take advantage of the absence of product patent protection." The Indian pharmaceutical industry was also "actively supported through public investments in R & D and manufacturing", which accounted for 37 per cent of the investments in research and development in pharmaceuticals till 1989-1990. India's commitment to comply with Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) necessitated amending the Patents Act, 1970 in April this year and the reintroduction of product patents in pharmaceuticals.

When the mail box installed for patents applications in 1995 was finally opened this year, the largest number of applications turned out to be from the US-based pharmaceutical giant Pfizer. A multinational like Pfizer is estimated to invest roughly $802 million on R&D for a single drug, which is almost four times what the entire Indian pharmaceutical industry invested in R&D in 2003-2004. All the Indian pharmaceutical companies together spent Rs 1002.1 crore or $218 million on R & D that year. Chaudhuri, however, has reservations about the $802 million estimate, but acknowledges that the R&D expenditure of Indian companies was a drop in the ocean by global yardsticks.

He is more concerned about what Indian companies spend their R & D funds on. Till date pharmaceutical companies in India have focused on R&D for new processes of manufacturing patented drugs. The focus now seems to be shifting towards developing intermediates for multinationals. A McKinsey study shows India to be endowed with the potentials of emerging as a low-cost hub for sourcing bulk drugs and intermediates. So who gets to fund research on tropical diseases like malaria?

The pharmaceutical giants around the world developed and marketed 1,393 new drugs between 1975 and 1999, of which only 13 or roughly one per cent, were for tropical diseases. Most of those 13 new drugs were born out of veterinary research, modifications of existing medicines and the United States military. The commercial pharmaceutical companies developed only four of the 13 drugs developed to combat tropical diseases. Yet the tropics harbour the most populous pockets of the world. So effectively only 10 per cent of the global research is focused on combating 90 per cent of the "global disease burden".

Commercial pharmaceutical investment in research and development ignores the populous pauperdom because a market potential of less than $500 million does not make investment in R&D remunerative. To be quite fair to the mega corporations (honour bound as they are to guarantee return on investment to their shareholders), what they really find attractive are markets of the size of $1 billion or more. But whoever said that altruism had anything to do with business ethics? Are patents after all not bait for corporations to invest in R&D in return for assured gains from the fruits of it?

Chaudhuri is also concerned about the "mechanical" manner in which the Patents Act was amended in India. The provision for compulsory licensing to produce drugs patented elsewhere for instance, "mechanically" requires Indian pharmaceutical companies to produce such medicines for export, provided they have compulsory licences from the importing countries. The Act, thus glosses over a concession made to 50 Least Developed Countries (LDCs) like Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Uganda and Zambia in the Doha Declaration, allowing them to stave off product patent protection for pharmaceuticals till 2016. "If the bias in the Patents Act, 1970, which did not provide product patent protection in pharmaceuticals, was in favour of the non-patentees," the author says, "the bias in the amended Act is clearly in favour of the patentees."

The only blemish in this excellent work is a number of proofing errors (quite uncharacteristic of the august house of Oxford University Press), which confound the reader every once in a while. On page 115 for instance, the author seems to say that "pharmaceutical product patents are not mandatory till 2116..." for the fifty Least Developed Countries, when he had earlier (and rightly) mentioned that the Doha Declaration had absolved LDCs of the stricture till 2016. A footnote on page 13 refers to the "adverse affects of TRIPS". If such blights are a price the publishers have paid for rushing off to press in a tearing hurry, then they are amply compensated by striking the market while the issue is still hot.■

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Health Care Business

Rishikesha T. Krishnan

THE RANBAXY STORY: THE RISE OF AN INDIAN MULTINATIONAL
By Bhupesh Bhandari
Penguin/Viking, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 240, Rs. 450.00

Outside the Information Technology industry, Ranbaxy is India's most genuinely multinational company. This well-researched book tells the story of Ranbaxy's evolution. Bhupesh Bhandari has woven the tale well – it has strong personalities, serendipitous events, the twists and turns of policy changes, and even intrigue. Far from being a dry account of business history, *The Ranbaxy Story* is thus a highly readable work of contemporary business history.

This story has two central characters – Bhai Mohan Singh, the patriarch with his roots in present-day Pakistan, a businessman of the old school, opportunistic in thinking and with the grace and manner to build relationships with anyone who could possibly help his business interests. "Dr. Singh" is the other, the scholarly son of Bhai Mohan Singh with a Ph.D. in Pharmacy from a top American University, a sharp contrast to his father, quiet, taciturn, aloof. Bhai Mohan Singh created the base for Ranbaxy, Dr. Parvinder Singh transformed it into what it is today – the largest Indian pharmaceutical company, with a distinctly international footprint, and global ambitions. Bhandari gives us a close insight into their falling-out, a microcosm of the generation gap between the successful businessmen of license-permit Raj and their progeny seeking their destiny in a deregulated world of new opportunity.

Business histories often focus on patriarchs and chief executive officers, relegating their followers and team members to nonexistence, thus perpetuating a myth that corporations were built singlehanded through the genius of charismatic individuals. One of the nice things about this book is that the author resists this temptation. Instead, he tells us about many of the others who contributed to the growth of Ranbaxy like J.M. Khanna who built up the R&D department, Deepak Chattaraj and Sanjay Kaul who set up many of Ranbaxy's international business ventures, and above all, D.S. Brar, Dr. Parvinder Singh's closest associate and alter-ego who managed Ranbaxy in the years immediately after Dr. Singh's untimely demise.

For the uninitiated, Bhandari also provides historical sketches of the world's great pharmaceutical companies such as Roche, Glaxo, Pfizer, and Eli Lilly. Almost all of them owe their origin to idealistic founders. Parvinder Singh clearly belongs to this community of idealistic visionaries though with a different flavour than that of Cipla's Y.K. Hamied. Thus Singh was one of the earliest in the Indian pharma industry to embrace the new intellectual property rights regime, while Hamied still sees it as a noose around the neck of developing countries.

If there is one sector of the Indian economy in which government policy helped create business-level capabilities, this book reiterates the fact that it is the pharma sector. While the primary objective of the Indian Patents Act of 1970 may have been the abolition of the monopoly of MNCs and the lowering of drug prices, there is little doubt that this legislation gave an impetus to the growth of process skills in the pharma industry. It is these process skills that allowed Indian pharmaceutical companies to break into global markets as the new process routes they pioneered cut costs and attracted the attention of the product patent holders in developed markets. Ranbaxy's new process to produce cefaclor convinced the drug's innovator of Ranbaxy's process capabilities and facilitated the creation of a joint venture with Eli Lilly (which was subsequently dissolved, but for other reasons). This heralded Ranbaxy's arrival on the global stage as a serious challenger.

What does it take to build a multinational company from India? *The Ranbaxy Story* suggests that focus is a good starting point. Unlike his brothers who considered investments in industries as diverse as hotels, sunglasses, chemicals and telecom, Parvinder Singh remained steadfastly committed to the health care business. Apart from gaining in-depth knowledge of this industry, this enabled Ranbaxy to make the investments required to build a competitive position in global markets. Over its history, Ranbaxy succeeded in attracting the finest talent from both multinationals and public research labs, and this is a second important factor. Apart from propounding a distinctive and energizing long-term vision, Ranbaxy's Parvinder Singh also stayed the course even when he was under fire for the slow growth of the company as its international expansion unfolded more slowly than expected. Opportunistic deals and smart negotiations also played a role – when Eli Lilly walked out of a joint venture with Ranbaxy, the company adroitly bargained to get rights to a small portfolio of longstanding, off-patent Eli Lilly products rather than monetary compensation – this helped Ranbaxy create a product pipeline of interest to American retailers and paved the way for penetration of its own products. Last but not least, is the availability of resources. The high profitability of cefaclor and the success in obtaining 180-day exclusivity for a couple of generic drugs enabled Ranbaxy to finance further international expansion.

While histories of a number of Indian companies and business groups have been written in recent years, this history of Ranbaxy stands out for its balanced presentation without hyperbole or encomia. Yet, this reviewer feels compelled to make a few critical comments. Firstly, there is no mention of the sources of material for this book, or acknowledgement of secondary sources. There is not even a list of references or endnotes. Since there is no preface either, the reader is left wondering how the author put this whole thing together. Secondly, in an attempt to simplify the narrative, the author has glossed over important nuances of the pharma business. For instance, while referring to the 180-days exclusivity obtained by Ranbaxy for certain generic products in the U.S. market, he gives the impression that this automatically goes to the first company to launch the generic in the market. However, in actuality the 180-day exclusivity goes only to a company that is successful in a "para 3 filing," a risky process that involves challenging the patent of the original patent holder. Some explanation of these details either in the text itself or through a set of notes/glossary would have made the book more useful to students of management and even the lay reader. Nevertheless, we hope that Bhupesh Bhandari will write more books in the future and keep these points in mind.■

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Cultural Diversity and Development

Prahlad Singh Shekhawat

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2004
Oxford University Press, New York, 2004, pp. 390, Rs. 575.00

There is an increasing realization that in our age of globalization, a kind of homogenization of cultures and life styles is taking place leading to a mono culture and macdonaldization. Cultural diversity and indigenous ways of life are coming under threat. This mono culture spread by multinational corporations and the law of the market is a kind of aping of western life style and values. The homogenization seen as cultural invasion is also leading to a backlash in the form of assertion of cultural identity by social movements in the non-western world. The backlash takes the form of legitimate indigenous assertions as well as more fundamentalist and xenophobic movements.

The ideology of development in the developing world is in many ways based on the western modes of increasing growth and consumption as well as hedonist individualism. This model of development has not generally been able to eradicate poverty and inequality, and has lead to social disintegration and environmental degradation. Indigenous knowledge systems and traditional livelihoods have been eroded by the modernization project. This has revived the need for indigenous approaches and promotion of cultural liberty and diversity. Cultural urges for autonomy and identity are being taken more seriously not only as a means of development but also as ends in themselves. At the same time worries persist about the rise of fundamentalism and conflict between different ethnic and religious communities.

In the western world itself there now exist substantial populations of diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Democracy and pluralism entail not only solidarity with at least minimum societal values but also cultural liberty and diversity. In Canada for example the objective of the state and society is not to promote integration and assimilation but to preserve and celebrate multiculturalism as a national value asset.

Human development is firstly about enlarging choices and enabling people to lead the kind of life they choose by providing them with tools and opportunities. In recent years Human Development Reports have argued that this is as much a question of politics as economics; from protecting human rights to deepening democracy, which includes cultural liberty. The United Nations *Human Development Report 2004*(1) focuses on cultural liberty in our diverse world, both as an instrument as well as a goal of development. Cultural liberty helps people to choose one of the most enriching values in terms of identity and meaning of life. In our times when clash of civilizations is a dominant theme it is a challenge to mitigate conflicts over language, religion, culture and ethnicity. If the world is to reach the Millenium Development Goals and eradicate poverty it must first overcome the challenge of building inclusive, culturally diverse societies.

Recent headlines are full of dilemmas: how will the constitution of Iraq satisfy demands for fair representation of Shias and Kurds? Which and how many of the languages spoken in Afghanistan should the new constitution recognize as the official language? Is the French legislature right in approving the ban on headscarves and other religious symbols in public schools? Is it true that Hispanics in the United States resist assimilation into mainstream American culture? How will the Nigerian federal court deal with Shia law ruling to punish adultery by death? Should the common civil code granting equal rights to women be extended to the Muslim minority in India? How will the peace talks between Tamil and Sinhala conclude? What is a legitimate cultural liberty and how can it be managed in our diverse world?

The *Human Development Report* tries to make a case for building more inclusive societies by adopting policies that openly recognize cultural differences and encourage a multicultural approach. The reason cultural identities have been suppressed or ignored for long is because it is believed that allowing diversity to flourish although desirable in theory in practice actually leads to conflict, weakening of the state and slow development. The Report argues that it is a myth to believe that the best approach in a diverse society is assimilation around a single national standard. This often leads to suppression of cultural identities.

The Report proposes to demolish a number of popular myths about cultural liberty and diversity.

Myth 1. People's ethnic identities compete with their attachment to the state, so there is a trade off between recognizing diversity and unifying the state: Individuals have multiple identities that are complementary like ethnicity, language, religion and race as well as citizenship. There is no inherent conflict between recognition of cultural differences and state unity. It is not a zero sum game. To some extent identity includes choice. Individuals can choose what priority to give to one membership over another in different contexts. According to sociologists there are boundaries of identity that separate "us" from "them" but these boundaries shift and blur to incorporate broader groups of people.

In modern times "nation building" has been a major objective and most states have tried a single identity. When they have succeeded it is often at the cost of repression or persecution. It is the lesson of our times that efforts to eliminate or ignore cultural groups lead to strong resistance. Tensions on the other hand have been resolved by recognizing cultural identities.

Studies have shown that the goals of national unity and cultural diversity can coexist. In Belgium citizens were very positive when asked if they felt both Belgian and Flemish or Walloon, and in Spain they replied that they felt both Spanish as well as Catalan or Basque. Countries such as these have worked hard to accommodate diverse cultures and build respect for different identities and trust in state institutions. Similarly immigrants don't have to deny commitment to their families and loyalties to their new countries. There is no basis in the view that if immigrants do not "assimilate" they will fragment the country. Assimilation has to be by choice not forced if it has to be a viable model.

Myth 2. Ethnic groups are prone to violent conflict with each other in clashes of values, so there is a trade-off between respecting diversity and sustaining peace: It cannot be denied that particularly since the end of the Cold War violent conflicts have taken place not so much between states but within them between ethnic groups. However, recent studies are agreed that cultural differences themselves are not the relevant factor. Wars and conflicts arise due to economic inequalities between groups as well as due to struggles over political power, land and other economic assets. Cultural identity plays the role of a driver for political mobilization but is not itself the cause of ethnic conflicts. The troops are rallied by invoking a single identity, its symbols and its history of grievances. The Sweto riots in 1976 in South Africa were caused by persistent inequality but the attempts to impose Afrikaans in Black schools proved the spark. Cultural groups are quickly mobilized to resist disparities and injustices. It is therefore unwise to allow economic and political inequality or suppress cultural differences.

Myth 3. Cultural liberty requires defending traditional practices, so there could be a trade-off between recognizing cultural diversity and other human development priorities such as progress in development, democracy and human rights: It is argued that multiculturalism is a policy of conserving cultures, which tends to defend practices that violate human rights and that movement for cultural recognition do not adhere to democratic norms. The Report however maintains that cultural freedom and respect for diversity should not be confused with the diffusion of tradition. Culture is not a frozen or fixed set of values or practices. It is all the time being recreated as people question, adapt and redefine their values and customs to changing reality and exchange of ideas ."Cultural Liberty" is not the same as "culture", "tradition" and "authenticity". Any practices that deny individuals equality of opportunity and violate their human rights such as denying women equal right to education is unacceptable. Self appointed leaders who have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo in the guise of keeping up the tradition may not reflect the views of the people as a whole.

People making demands for cultural freedom should adhere to democratic principles like the values of human rights and human freedom. The Report points out one good model in the case of the Sami people in Finland, who enjoy autonomy in a parliament that has democratic structures and procedures but is part of the Finnish state. The process of development requires active participation of people in fighting for human rights and shifts in values. Within such a participation there need be no clash between respect for cultural difference and human rights and development.

Myth 4. Ethnically diverse countries are less able to develop, so there is a trade-off between respecting diversity and promoting development: The Report maintains that diverse societies have low levels of income and human development but there is no evidence that this is related to cultural diversity. One study points out that diversity has been the source of poor economic performance in Africa but this is related to political decision-making that follow ethnic rather than national interests and not to diversity itself .

Some multi-ethnic countries have stagnated while there are others that have been very successful. Malaysia with 62% of its people being Malays and other indigenous groups, 30% Chinese and 8% Indian was the world's 10th fastest growing economy during 1970-90, years when it also implemented affirmative action polices. Mauritius ranks 64 in the human development index, the highest in Sub-Saharan Africa. It has a diverse population of African, Indian, Chinese and European origin—with 50% Hindu, 30% Christian and 17% Muslim.

Myth 5. Some countires are more likely to make developmental progress than others, and some cultures have inherent democratic values while others do not, so there is a trade-off between accommodating certain cultures and promoting development and democracy: The Report agues that there is no evidence from statistical analysis or historical studies of a causal relationship between culture and economic progress and or democracy. When Max Weber's theory of Protestant Ethic was explained as the cause for the rise of capitalism, Catholic countries like France and Italy were growing faster than Protestant Britain and Germany. So the theory was expanded to mean Christian or western. When Japan, South Korea, Thailand and other East Asians achieved record growth rates, the theory had to be rejected.

Similarly failures of democratization in the non-western world are attributed to cultural traits of intolerance and "authoritarian values" leading at the global level to "clash of civilizations" in the 21st century. This theory exaggerates the difference between "civilization" groups and ignores the similarities among them. The Report rightly claims that the West has no monopoly on democracy or tolerance and these is no line of historical division between a tolerant and democratic West and despotic East. Plato and Augustine were equally authoritarian as Kautilya and Confucius. Champions of democracy are to be found not only in Europe. In 16th century India, Akbar preached religious tolerance and in 7th century Japan, Prince Shotoku introduced the constitution (Kempo) that proclaimed that important decisions should be made not by one but by many. Recent findings reveal that democracy originated not in Greece but Mesopotamia or present day Iraq some 2500 years ago.[1] The World Values Survey shows that people in Muslim countries have as much support for democratic values as do people in non-Muslim countries. Ideas of participatory decision making on important public issues have been part of many traditions in Africa and elsewhere.

The Report believes that it is a wrong assumption made by certain theories that culture is to be clearly divided into pure "cultures" and "civilizations". Almost all societies have undergone change in values as in the case regarding the role of women and gender equality in recent times. Social customs have been changing among Catholics in Chile, Muslims in Bangladesh to Buddhists in Thailand. It is an important theme of recent research in anthropology to discern the effect of change in power relations on the dynamics of change in tradition. Although anthropologists have given up the concept of culture as fixed and bound the trend is growing for mainstream political interests to find the core values and traits of a people and their culture. This trend helps in social mobilization rather than depicting social reality. Explanations of cultural determinism can fuel support for certain nationalistic policies that lead to suppressing the so-called " inferior" cultures, which are wrongly supposed to be obstacles for national unity, development and democracy.

The Report does a brilliant job of debunking stereotypes about different cultures. Hierarchy of cultures in terms of the superior and inferior is no longer tenable. The modernization paradigm which proposed western cultural traits and pattern of economic growth as models of development for the traditional societies is no more considered appropriate. Similarly the orthodox Marxist conception that culture is merely a superstructure which follows change in the economic base of the means and relations of production has been exposed. Diverse cultural innovations leading to developments in economy and polity also question the 'End of History' theory which proposes the western liberal society as the supreme stage of political and economic evolution.

However, lack of hierarchy of cultures should not lead to the postmodern conclusion that all culture or cultural practices are equally valued and are above any kind of judgment except from within a cultural tradition. This sort of cultural relativism needs to be distinguished from cultural pluralism, which celebrates multiple cultures while maintaining certain core universal values. There can be many paths to achieving the core values. These values are to be arrived at through dialogue and consensus among diverse cultures.

The need for some minimum core universal values is contained in the belief that in spite of cultural diversity there is rooted within us all a common humanity and a cross-cultural intersubjectivity. The history of cultures reveals that they have been interacting with and influencing each other. This is even more so in the contemporary globalized and increasingly interdependent world. The environmental problems of our common planet knows no national or cultural boundaries. Within the same nation there are diverse cultures and various cultural streams within the same tradition. Extreme inequalities in a globalized world have to be minimized. Religious, ethnic and nationalist prejudice and conflicts have to be resolved by certain agreed common norms. Therefore there is an urgent need to arrive at some common universal values consciously and democratically without their being left to the arbitrary forces of market or the hegemony of more powerful cultures. The Report fails to show enough urgency about evolving minimum universal values in a multicultural world or unity in diversity. Individual rights and cultural liberty needs to be preserved while evolving a common ethic.

The Report does suggest obliquely that although cultural diversity and liberty need not necessarily come into conflict with universal values like human rights, democratic principles and equal opportunities for women, if they do so then the universal values should prevail. But the Report ignores the view that traditional cultures sometimes tend to be undemocratic, hierarchical and provide less equality for women.

As the Report makes it clear the impulse for human rights and democracy have more or less existed in all cultures. However, in the western tradition these values were continuously reformed and for the first time codified in terms of laws and articles of the Constitution. Also the struggle for equality of women was sharpened and articulated systematically much more by the women's movement in the West. Similarly critical scrutiny and rational and scientific enquiry have been articulated in a different manner in many cultures.

Perhaps in the eastern tradition certain values like compassion, intuition and spiritual consciousness were more prevalent. Cosmologies and modes of adaptations prevail in the non-western world which are more in harmony with nature. In trying to be politically correct by equating eastern and western traditions the Report is deficient in a nuanced approach, which delineates complexity and differences.

In the final analysis the Report is a timely focus on cross-cultural issues which tend to be ignored or avoided due to unexamined assumptions or because of the fear of causing offence.■

Reference

[1] Democracy and Discontent. Interview with John Keane, Profession of Politics, at the University of Westminster, *The Times of India* 12 March 2005

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Forms of Human Interaction

Prabir Purkayastha

WEBS OF HISTORY: INFORMATION, COMMUNICATION AND TECHNOLOGY FROM EARLY TO POST-COLONIAL INDIA
Edited by Amiya Kumar Bagchi, Dipankar Sinha, Barnita Bagchi
Manohar, Delhi, 2005, pp. 298, Rs. 695.00

One of the problems with a book that covers the gamut of communication forms and technologies and from Harappa to the present is that it is too demanding of any reviewer, certainly this one. The volume in question attempts to do this based on a set of papers presented in the panel on "History of Information and Communications Technology in India" at the Mysore session of the Indian History Congress, 2003. It is a fascinating account of different forms of communications and information, such as those described in the *Arthashashtra* or that of the Armenian merchants in the 17th century. The discussion of the visual narrative of the *patuas* and its translation from the context of the *Nawabi* Court to the bazaar, the change from stone engravings to palm leaf form in Kerala, bring out not only the functional importance of communication in different periods but also forms themselves being a reflection of the social relationships.

It is difficult to do justice to all the interesting and diverse material in the collection. The account of Kesavan Veluthat of the changing forms of information storage and retrieval – the use of epigraphy to record property rights of an insecure new land-owning implant in the Kerala region and its later merging into the less permanent palm leaf form with their growing security, bring out the connection between the social context and its communication forms. This changing form in the nature of visual communications is also what Ratnabali Chatterjee brings out in her treatment of the audio-visual rendering of the *patuas* of Bengal. The complex play of social institutions, their decay and transformation, as the *patuas* change from court artists to company (East India Company) and then, finally to bazaar artists are dealt with and also the transformation of the spatial and other relationships between the various figures described in this audio-visual medium.

The rise of merchants and the importance of maintaining and transmitting information, are correlated with mercantile capitalism and the rise of colonialism. The accepted view on the rise of colonialism is that it was the superior military power of Europeans that created the colonies. To this, we must now add superior forms of information gathering and communications as well. The essays of Ruquia Hussain and Isharat Alam deal with the Armenian merchants and the new Dutch East India Company. It is clear that the new companies that came into existence in this period were much better organized to gather and utilize information regarding demands and prices in far-flung markets than individual merchant families. The only other formation that could compete with these new mercantile entities was the Armenian merchant community where the community worked as a whole to collect and process this information. The technological advances of the printing press and the use of standard manuals and accounting practices also meant that the community could generate and process information in the same way as the new mercantile companies did and lost out only when the military power of the European state was harnessed to the trading objectives of these companies. Even in this crude and brutal form of colonial enterprise, the basis of the colonial power was not just military power but also the power of information.

The rise of organized news gathering, initially within the confines of the Mughal Court and later as an independent professional enterprise in India pre-dates the more well known European ones of Reuter, AP and others. Iqbal Hussain and G.T. Kulkarni bring out this aspect strengthening the belief that the transformation of Indian society was no different from that taking place in Europe. It is only colonialism that aborts these developments.

If we look at communications in the larger context, we also need to relate the technology of communications to the kind of society that it helped develop. This is not at the level of technological determinism but marking out the boundaries of what is achievable within a certain form of communication and therefore some limits on the kind of society that could develop. We have also seen how the societal forms itself militate against certain forms of technology developing: paper and paper making so important to Central Asia and East Asia is seen to be marginal in India where the importance of memorized knowledge and preserving caste privileges consigns it to the periphery.

Instead of the organic growth of new institutions, we have transplanted ones such as Reuter who are then far more closely allied with the colonial objective of keeping a "native" population under subjugation. Reuter's role in distorting Gandhiji's Green Pamphlet (Samendranath Bera) is an exercise of this nature.

Some of the essays in the collection lack this element of locating the forms of communications to the changing nature of society within which different forms develop. We learn very little from the pieces on Harappan times or of the later Mauryan-Gupta period of the dynamic of communication forms and their social context. While the Harappan exercise is admittedly difficult with our inability to decipher their script, it still is not enough to discuss the spread of the Harappan culture and the various materials that they used without touching on the seals, weights and measures used and what their standardization tells us about this civilization. Similarly, we learn very little about the changes to the *Arthashastra* network of information in the Gupta period.

While the editors must be congratulated on bringing together such a wealth of material in one volume, there are certain areas that remain relatively untouched. In a volume in which we talk about information, communications and technology, technology really gets short shrift. We do not address the vital question of why the written form of communication is so sparse in early India. If paper was available in central Asia by 100 BC, it is a mystery why its use to write accounts should be so alien to our past. Putting up inscriptions over a large area is more for marking out of imperial territory, considering the overwhelming numbers of these societies could not read. It does appear that the need of myth making and protecting the brahmanical monopoly of knowledge meant that writing itself needed to be restricted. Writing therefore becomes relegated to recording of land grants, aid to memorized text or manufacturing of genealogies. It is not surprising therefore that the historical accounts we have even in this volume, are based on others: Jewish merchants, Armenian traders, etc., apart from the more well known accounts of ancient travellers from other lands.

If we look at communications in the larger context, we also need to relate the technology of communications to the kind of society that it helped develop. This is not at the level of technological determinism but marking out the boundaries of what is achievable within a certain form of communication and therefore some limits on the kind of society that could develop. We have also seen how the societal forms itself militate against certain forms of technology developing: paper and paper making so important to Central Asia and East Asia is seen to be marginal in India where the importance of memorized knowledge and preserving caste privileges consigns it to the periphery. It would have been instructive to compare the initial Iron Age city based civilization of the Mauryas to that of the later Gupta period where the cities become less important. The change of the administrative structure from a centralized imperial system to a more decentralized one would have also changed its mode of information gathering and organization.

Gunakar Muley's account of the semaphore telegraph system in India as well as Sanchari Roy Mukherjee's contribution on Indian railways are both

very interesting. While Mukerjee is undoubtedly right in identifying the colonial objective of the railway system as a kind of funnel sucking out India's natural resources though the ports and also that it did not have the kind of backward and forward linkage it had in Europe, its role in development of Indian industrialization is underestimated. While the infrastructure developments in the subcontinent were largely driven by British colonial needs, Ghulam Kibria, (*Technology Acquisition in Pakistan*, City Press, 1998) has traced the origin of the Lahore machine tools industry (and also of Batala) to the Mughalpura Railway Workshop and its pool of thousands of skilled workers.

The authors of papers on the new information age introduced by digital technologies are more concerned about the much-hyped claims of the digital millennia than a more thorough examination of the impact of new information technologies on society. While debunking is important in the current context, it would have been more interesting to also analyse what the new elements in the current crop of information and communications technology are and how they are likely to reconfigure social relationships.

One can look upon new technologies as bringing more possibilities, but to conclude that these possibilities become the immediate reality as the techno-optimists hold is to forget history. The ever-increasing demand for cotton in the new mechanized textile industry in Great Britain and the North of the US expanded slavery enormously in the South. The printing press produced — as the second most popular book after the Bible — a handbook of witch burning *Malleus maleficarum* (The Hammer of Witches), published by the Catholic Inquisition Authorities, which went through no fewer than 20 editions. It is plausible that the mass character of witch burning after 1500 AD is a reflection of the mass distribution of this manual made possible by the new technology of the printing press. That technology is automatically liberating is certainly not brought out by its history. While it is important to debunk the myth of the new information age overcoming the problems of development, lack of democracy and inequitable distribution of wealth without our having to do anything, a larger frame of reference here would have been more satisfying.

The modern section of the collection looks at the emerging digital divide (Barnita Bagchi and Ishita Mukherhee) and also of the manipulative use of the powerful new medium itself (Dipankar Sinha). The problem here is that the impact of ICT on governance cannot be reduced to just e-governance as Dipankar Sinha's paper tends to do. Of course, e-governance as a substitute for representative democracy is a fraud on the people. But the ability to access information which earlier was the preserve of the few has produced certain important changes. Today, the expert is no longer the powerful figure he was earlier, by virtue of his access to knowledge that was institutionally created and tightly controlled. The past had a scarcity of public knowledge. The anarchy of the current information age, the ability to copy and multiply information has produced instead the age of plenty. The expert is now one who can sort out the wheat from the chaff rather than one who has access to knowledge as opposed to others who do not. The collective work of a large group today can challenge the experts who serve the rich and the powerful. The debate over WTO is no longer left to a few who discuss arcane matters of international trade but involves a host of activists as well as experts with knowledge very much in the public domain.

It is true, as we have argued earlier that appearance of a new technology is not liberating in itself. But ICT not only represents potential for concentration and skewing of information flows but also the potential for subverting such concentration. Just as the rich and powerful would like to increase their control, the others have to fight to not let this happen. Just as ICT cannot substitute for democracy in a neo-liberal order, nor can its collapse be brought about automatically with the spread of new communication technologies — the potential of technology will be realized only through struggles. The printing press may have helped initially the witch-burning craze, but it did democratize knowledge finally and contributed to the fall of the medieval order. Just as the neo-liberal order can be helped temporarily by the power of this new technology but cannot withstand its power in the hands of the people for all times. Finally, I would like to echo Amiya Bagchi in that the enemies of information society are not winning all the battles.■

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A Descriptive Engagement

Abhilasha Kumari

BECOMING A GLOBAL AUDIENCE: LONGING AND BELONGING IN INDIAN MUSIC TELEVISION
By Vamsee Juluri
Orient Longman, New Delhi, 2003, pp.153, Rs.300.00

In a world trying to grapple with the contradictions of a global reality and a need for cultural identity rooted in local traditions and history Vamsee Juluri's book *Becoming a Global Audience* tries to address some of these issues through her study of music television and specifically countdown shows. These shows with the arrival of satellite channels became very popular and channels were inundated with such shows. Juluri attempts to substantiate her theoretical position or positions through a theoretical and empirical engagement with media structures and the text audience interface in the context of countdown shows. The second area that Juluri tries to confront with a 'generational wonder' and a sense of 'dismay' is what appears to the author as a cultural storm unleashed by the 'satellite invasion' of 1991. She sees it as a shift from declining Nehruvian ideals to one of unabashed consumerism. During the study she is confronted with the reality of a changed India and the study attempts to face up to this change. The author sees this change as an aspect of a global phenomenon, an unfurling of political and economic forces on a worldwide scale and she identifies this phenomenon as having unilateral and totalitarian ambitions.

The academic purpose of the author in this study is to attempt to bring together divergent traditions of media research as audience research and international communication together at a time when according to the author such studies are the need of the hour. She looks at debates on international communication and globalization, audience studies with a political economy approach. She attempts to situate audience studies in the global context, and concurrently recognize postcoloniality as a fundamental condition of the global context. She also looks at debates within cultural studies about audience reception, particularly in the context of globalization. In this context she attempts to re-center India in the debates about media and globalization. According to her there is a very Indian experience of globalization, which cannot be dismissed.

In the case of India although the genre may be transnational content is national or sub-national. If countdown shows were classified on the basis of their music then only western countdown shows would be considered global given their worldwide outreach. While recognizing the domination of western media production, such a view would imply that the study of globalization would be restricted to the reception of western programming in various countries, although as in the case of India, western programmes do not enjoy the same level of popularity as the local and national programmes. Instead she tries to understand globalization by examining the rise of a particular genre as a whole within a certain historical context. Rather than assume that TV viewers in India switch from being global, national and regional viewers, it is more useful to situate the rise of a genre itself in the wider social and cultural forces that may be said to characterize globalization as well the national infliction in India in the name of liberalization. Juluri sees countdown shows as an example of how audiences negotiate meaning at the level of their daily lives their time, space and relationships as well as the broader network of capitalist production both at a national and transnational level. She hopes through her analysis to unlock ways in which local, the national and the global have begun to interact since liberalization in India and look at the intelligibilities that are constituted in the light of these changing experiences around the genre on the basis of access to certain kinds of cultural competence.

She uses the political economy approach to analyse the growth and

While sharing her concerns about the growing acceptance of audiences to the processes of globalization and the discursive limitations of modernity one need not resort to nostalgia about a debatable past but instead perhaps meaningfully look for alternatives that are squarely rooted in material and cultural realities.

development of Indian television and points out how the audience evolves out of decisions in the political and economic realms and is transformed into global audiences through media strategies. She points out how music television is creating an awareness of being a transnational audience. By assimilating and naturalizing new ways of watching film songs audiences engage with the global in similar and different ways. Juluri also focuses on these strategies and how they are employed to establish a view that privatization and commercialization contribute to making television more accessible, representative and empowering. This fits in well with the middle class youth (which according to Juluri is the base of popular culture) aspirations to be a part of transnational community as a means of accessing its material benefits, especially in a context where youth's engagement with music does not articulate rebellion. But according to Juluri this perceived empowerment is not in an interactive sense nor reflects political gain, however does reveal how media presentation and audience reading are connected to the broader field of social and political struggle in the contemporary Indian context.

Juluri emphasizes that the question of choice has a different meaning in the context of globalization and growing transnational monopolies and cultural production by a smaller number of players with immense resources, this partially negates the relevance of how audiences actually negotiate meanings of messages produced by mass media. The deregulatory political climate is leading to privatization, commercialization, and weakening of the public sphere as a resource and forum for political participation. But there is still a need to focus on the nature of this political experience and the need to look at "mediated experience" involving complex and deep social connections between people and activities across spaces and times in the context of globalization. Liberalization, with its rampant consumerism is seen as process in which particular commonsensical middle class notion of privilege and accountability are transformed into an ideal of prosperity for all with the support of private enterprise. She points to an attempt to gloss over real class differences in the reception of music television. Juluri identifies cultural strategies used to posit universality through the invocation of the ideals of liberal democracy and related notions of equality which operate through the discourses of modernity and its underlying capitalist structure.

Becoming global for Indian music television audiences is a process of seeking, sometimes with a false sense of success, recognition of who they believe they are, however, at the same time there is an ongoing process of reappropriation, repositioning with newly constructed categories and competitive formats. She points to the complex nature of these processes to show that it is not a simple articulation of modern and non-modern discourses.

The process used according to Juluri by such programming is one of appropriation rather than of injection and tends to move away from diffusion of development ideas or concern over absorption of foreign ideas and moves towards a process of negotiation which at least apparently remains at the level of sentiment with no social or political ramification. Music TV fractures the Indian sentiment even as it claims to spread it and creates a false sense of reciprocity with the dominant global music culture. She points to televisions celebration of its own commercialization through pitiful stereotypes, at the same time recognizes the possibility of a contradiction in the audience's reading of it.

Juluri stresses the need for an Indian social global vision and questions whether India has a global vision after nonviolence and nonalignment. Having identified globalization's hegemonic potential in very 'war like' terminology she feels globalization need not sink into its own 'cruel hegemonic forms'. She posits the possibility of a universal dream, which may make it worth carrying on. She looks at the Nehruvian dream with nostalgia and the Gandhian values for inspiration because she cannot reconcile with the marginalization of India in real economic and political terms under capitalist, colonial and postcolonial domination. But to her the existing situation is bleak. There is an overwhelming desire to make it big fast, with the least amount of effort, and to justify and account for this craving. Juluri feels that such middle-class aspirations destroy the potential that other values may exist and there may be alternative social vision.

If one were to analyse the contribution of the book as a descriptive engagement with what has happened to Indian television and its audiences one would not hesitate to say that it is indeed an insightful book. However, if one were to look at it at the level of research and theory it is difficult not to see the contradictions not only in the theoretical approaches but the imposition of theory on data. Therefore, the arguments Juluri develops though significant in their explanatory value are not substantiated or supported by her field responses. Theoretical positions are not followed to their logical conclusions and left mid-way because the answers that she wants are not forthcoming. The problem is also with the middle class orientation of the research itself. A prefigured framework of questions rooted in middle class discourses is used to evaluate intelligibility. The problem is that such a premise implies that middle class intelligibility is the only means of accessing music television negating other intelligibilities and their significance in understanding audience perception. Another important and recurring feature of the study is the contradiction of participants to the premises of the researcher. Her dilemma is that of many Non Resident Indians who hanker for 'the' India they left behind and cannot adjust to a very changed reality. In conjuring her ideas for a pre-modern perspective she forgets the fundamental question of material basis of culture and its consequent social and political relationships which have greater implications beyond the 'emotional'. While sharing her concerns about the growing acceptance of audiences to the processes of globalization and the discursive limitations of modernity one need not resort to nostalgia about a debatable past but instead perhaps meaningfully look for alternatives that are squarely rooted in material and cultural realities.■

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Culture of Knowledge Production

Heeraman Tiwari

THE SANSKRIT EPICS' REPRESENTATION OF VEDIC MYTHS
By Danielle Feller
Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 2004, pp. xv+369, Rs.695.00

...as Feller herself acknowledges, any study of myths in the Veda and their representation in the later Sanskrit literature, especially the epics, has to take into account the semantic and lexical differences that exist between the two sets of texts. To understand the relationship between a Vedic word and its meaning(s) requires special training that is imparted in the tradition, and may not come merely by mastering Vedic grammar and lexicography.

Myths have fascinated all human societies, from the oral tradition to the written and to the age of cyber technology. Myths live forever, and, like genes, mutate and learn to survive and flourish in every generation. The term *myth* originates from the Greek *muthos,* which means "speech" and resembles the Sanskrit *katha, vac* ("story telling", "narration"). When talking about "myth" specialists draw a distinction between "the sacred" and "the profane" and suggest that myths give expression to "the sacred" tales of gods and super humans, for myths "ultimate or metaphysical reality" is not an issue. (For a summary, of this vast and much debated subject, see *The Encyclopedia of Religions*, under the entry *Myth*, vol. 10, pp. 261-272.)

Much literature has been produced on the definition, nature, structure and history of *myth* in all cultures, but, in India, myth holds a particular relevance. The culture of knowledge production and propagation in ancient India depended solely on oral tradition. And this explains the special interest the scholars of ancient India have in myths and story telling. Danielle Feller is one such western Indianist whose interest in the relationship between the Vedic myths and the two great Sanskrit epics has resulted in this very engaging and exciting book, which should delight every reader interested in literature, religion and philosophy of ancient India. In her introduction, Feller provides a very lucid survey of the literature on the definition and meaning of *myth* by modern scholars like Mircea Eliade, Wendy Doniger, Alf Hiltebeitel and others who have worked on Indian mythology. In justifying the topic, Feller begins by quoting (p.19) Wendy Doniger that "in the history of religions, the term myth has far more often been used to mean 'truth.' What makes this ambiguity possible is that myth is above all a story that is *believed*, believed to be true …despite sometimes massive evidence that it is, in fact, a lie." Feller then presents the debates between various scholars of the West on the function of myths and proposes to study them, what she calls, 'myth in action", particularly those that tell the tales of Vedic gods and then resurface in the later Sanskrit literature, especially the two epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*.

Feller says that her purpose in the book is not to follow the particular myths from their *Rgvedic* origin to the "various avtars throughout Sanskrit literature," but "to view one particular mythical motif as belonging to the general background of a particular culture," which "serve different ideological and cosmological aims"(p.41). However, as Feller herself acknowledges, any study of myths in the Veda and their representation in the later Sanskrit literature, especially the epics, has to take into account the semantic and lexical differences that exist between the two sets of texts. To understand the relationship between a Vedic word and its meaning(s) requires special training that is imparted in the tradition, and may not come merely by mastering Vedic grammar and lexicography. Such a predicament is not posed by non-Vedic Sanskrit literature. Also, as A.K. Ramanujan (*The Collected Essays*, 1999: 492-93) has pointed out (in 'The Two Realms of Kannada Folklore'), "the genres" of myth "are drawn or blurred differently in different cultures, though the genre-division may be universal. [M]ost of the signifiers may be the 'same', but what is signified may change." Hence a linear interpretation of myths from the Vedas to the epics may not be so simple. But, then, myths have their own ways of marking their objects, and this marking can be identified often by studying 'the internal framework of a text' (p.43).

One of the myths that Feller tries to study here is from the *Rgveda* (Hymns 10.51-53), the fire god *Agni's* hiding away from the rest of the gods. On being found out by the other gods, *Agni* explains that he hid away from the world of gods because he did not want to perform the sacrificial duties required of him. Finally, *Agni* agrees with certain conditions to return to work. This myth of *Agni* then travels through the late Vedic literature to the *Mahabharata* where, again, *Agni* is found missing from the world, only this time angered by an enraged sage. The myth is repeated in the *Mahabharata* several times with not much difference in its basic plot. What this myth explains, on the whole, is that the fire god has always to be propitiated and requested to return to the world to help mortal humans perform sacrificial rituals, because the fire god has been seen as the only medium to carry gifts and messages to the gods and ancestors and, in return, bring back blessings to the petitioner. Fire, in other words, has always been the prized possession of humans, which distinguishes them from, in fact makes them superior to, their primate ancestors as well as other species of the universe. A later Vedic philosophical text, the *Kathopanisad,* for example, too, celebrates the primacy of fire where a boy, Naciketas, has a dialogue with the god of death, Yama, to learn from him among other things the secrets of fire (1.13): "O death, you know the fire that leads to heaven, kindly reveal it to me." It is, also, refreshing to find in the Walt Disney version of Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* two of its characters, the lion and the monkey king, are jealous of the child Mowgli because as a human Mowgli can make (invoke) fire.

Similarly, Feller chooses to discuss in her next chapters other Vedic myths, two of them relate to the prominent gods, Indra and Soma. Myths related to these two gods are only too well known, but the discussion of their representation in the Sanskrit epics comes alive in Feller's account. It is not surprising, though, why the three of the most pre-eminent gods of the *Rgveda* have been picked up by the post-Vedic literary, philosophical and religious tradition. As the author summarizes in her conclusion, these mythic motifs not only form the basis for many themes in the Sanskrit epics, provide legitimacy to the epic tales, but also "many of the underlying meanings remain the same in the Rgveda and in the Epics." (p. 312) The author of the volume deals with the subject with a scholarship that is amply reflected in the selection and use of the bibliographic material, both primary and secondary. The book will be a useful source for those studying ancient Indian mythology.■

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Decoding the ethics of *Srimadbhagvadgita*

Purushottam Agrawal

THE WARRIOR AND THE CHARIOTEER
By V.M. Mohanraj
Leftword Books, 2005, pp. 183, Rs.350.00

Mohanraj has embarked upon a 'materialist interpre-tation' of the *Gita*. Naturally enough he draws upon the works of the earlier Marxists like Dange and Kosambi—agreeing more with the former than the latter.

Srimadbhagvadgita—or *Gita* in short, has been interpreted in many ways. It is considered one of the three fountainheads of departures of the authentically 'Vedic' worldview, the other two being the Brahmasutras and the eleven principal Upanishads. No philosopher can expect his views to be taken as 'authentic' extension or evolution of the perennial Vedic wisdom, if he cannot produce a convincing commentary of these three texts—the *Prasthan Trayee!*

Ever since Shankaracharya wrote his famous commentary on the *Prasthan Trayee* upholding his philosophical monism, it became an established academic practice in the Vedic philosophical tradition to go back to these three texts in order to 'read' them as supportive of one's own views. To the philosopher, all three are equally important, but the *Gita* is undoubtedly the first among equals due to the concise and all-encompassing nature of its discourse and more importantly due to the dramatic poignancy of the backdrop in which the discourse takes place. The poetic imagination and devices underlying the philosophical concerns and discourse have made the *Gita* accessible to the ordinary people besides being challenging for the trained philosopher.

The fascination with the *Gita* continues in the modern Hindu consciousness as well. In fact, it is in the modern times, thanks to the colonial encounter and the orientalist project of constructing Hindu tradition into a pale mirror image of monotheistic religion, that the Gita came to be seen as 'the book' of the Hindus—at par with 'the book' of the Christians or Muslims! The tradition itself regards the *Gita* very highly but not as 'the book'. This must be borne in mind in order to appreciate the difference between the traditional and the modern approaches to the *Gita*.

V.M. Mohanraj is dissatisfied with "most studies of the Bhagavad-Gita", as these, "seem to have got enmeshed in the philosophical web that drapes the poem and little attention has been paid to ethics, which the poem elaborately deals with"(p.36). The fact of the matter is every single modern commentary of the *Gita* engages with the questions of ethics. Mohanraj's observation is correct with reference to the traditional commentaries, but then the pre-moderns did not have existential anxieties and ethical dilemmas of the same type to deal with. They could afford to take their ethics and epistemology for granted.

Be that as it may, Mohanraj has embarked upon a 'materialist interpretation' of the *Gita*. Naturally enough he draws upon the works of the earlier Marxists like Dange and Kosambi—agreeing more with the former than the latter. Following Dange, he interprets "Brahma" of the *Gita* as, "the abstraction or the personification of the social organization called the commune, which as the Vedic Aryan had learnt from his forefathers, was the creator of man because…in the process of the two-legged beast blossoming into Man, the commune (gana) was the one and only decisive factor"(p.83).

While Kosambi in his interpretation (1959) described the *Gita* as an attempt to establish the 'hegemony' of the leisured classes, Mohanraj has a more sympathetic and nuanced understanding of the historical context of the text. He sees it occasioned by the transition of the historical stages of the development hence his insistence on decoding the ethical content of the philosophical message of the *Gita*: " The new social organization of the Aryans was, therefore, a historical necessity, slavery notwithstanding. The *Bhagavad-Gita*, which codified the basic tenets of that society, while buttressing the ideology of the propertied classes and privileged upper castes that constituted the progressive forces of that period, faithfully reflects the ethos of the times. And therein lies the secret of the immortality of this short poem"(p.109).

The "immortality" of this short poem, or of any poem, actually constitutes the greatest challenge to the Marxist method of reading literature. And the problem goes back to Marx himself. Faced with the vexed problem of the attraction the classical Greek art still held for the moderns of the industrial era, he sought to explain it in terms of the 'childhood nostalgia' of humankind! He was not blessed with a longer life to deal with the questions of the aesthetics and the historical evolution of the 'appreciation and influence' of a work of art, or for that matter a work of reflection and speculation. But the persistence of the simplistic notions of the 'reflection theory' (!) in the name of the 'materialist' interpretation is truly amazing.

Sadly, Mohanraj, like many Marxists, have chosen to completely ignore the most interesting Marxist reading of the *Gita* that is by Sahajananda Saraswati. The reason may be the language barrier—Sahajananda wrote in Hindi) A legendary figure of the peasant movement, Sahajananda was steeped in the traditional discourses and hermeneutics as well. He chose to read the *Gita* hermeneutically, treating it as a living and contemporary text and not as something frozen in time, and made the bold assertion: 'there is no contradiction between the moral stance (Dharma) of the *Gita* and that of the Marxists'. His reading of the *Gita* indicates the aborted possibilities of Hindu liberation theology with a Marxist orientation. It would have been interesting for Mohanraj to engage with Sahajananda's reading. May be, he could have balanced Sahajananda's hermeneutics with his insistence on the historical context!

Mohanraj makes a very significant and poignant observation in the preface, " my parents, who were devout Hindus, had in their prayer room, along with the pictures of the Hindu gods, a picture of Jesus Christ and they had as much faith in Christ as they had in Krishna. This, they could do, being Hindus"(p.XIII). One hears something familiar here, as my own mother's prayer room was blessed with a picture of Jesus! She could also do it 'being Hindu'. The point is: what is the role of the 'immortal' poem in this way of being Hindu? Is the poem really about 'monotheism' as Mohanraj, just like many Marxists, maintains? Or is monotheism a misnomer for the philosophy and epistemology of the *Gita*? Monotheism is predicated on the notion of the One True God (besides whom the rest are false gods), who sends His prophets to warn humankind so that they do not fall prey to the devil! The Godhead in the *Gita*, on the other hand claims to contain all that exists! That is why all the prayers and Bhakti reach him, no matter which god one chooses to worship. It is this spirit of going beyond the false dichotomies that informs the being of most of the ordinary Hindus who can have as much faith in Jesus as much in Krishna, if they choose to do so! And this without following any agenda of secularism and tolerance! Unfortunately, Mohanraj does not connect his own experience with his historical, materialist interpretation of the *Gita*. Had he done so, he would have taken important steps towards unveiling the 'secret of the immortality of this short poem.'

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Of the Historical and the Hagiographic

Amiya P. Sen

KRISHNA
By Shanta Rameshwar Rao. Paintings by Bulbul Sharma.
Orient Longman, New Delhi,2005, pp. 156+16, Rs. 750.00

It is interesting that popular stories often bordering on the scandalous and the profane should now be so freely and evocatively retold in the English language for, as a student of history, I am apt to recall that only about a hundred years back, the same had been indignantly assailed by the first crop of English educated Indians. Following Renan and his bid to separate the Christ of history from that of Christian mythology, the Hindu Renaissance too had looked to discover the historically verifiable Krishna. Also, deeply influenced as it was by Anglo Protestantism and the emerging philosophical moods in contemporary Europe, this Renaissance attempted to understand Krishna not so much as god but as a man who might justifiably be elevated to the status of god. There was, besides, a polemical side to this since Krishna was, for most Hindu protagonists, a more exemplary figure than Christ.

Over a period of time, this tendentious rhetoric led to the fragmentation of the Krishna lore and legend; the playful pastoral figure from Vraj country was deliberately suppressed in favour of the strategist and philosopher associated with the great Bharata war. The latter, evidently, was more easily appropriated by an emerging Hindu nationalism which saw in the divine charioteer, qualities reminiscent of a Gladstone or Bismarck. The 19th and 20th centuries, as we know, was replete with commentaries upon the *Gita* and numerous vernacular translations of this text. Sadly, the continuing attempt to sanitize the figure of Krishna threw into considerable disrepute the web of enchanting stories woven around the folk Krishna. In the late 19th century, the novelist Bankim Chandra sharply rebuked a poet of the class of Jaideb (of *Gita Gobinda* fame) for wantonly clouding the life of Krishna with amorous poetry. In his own treatise on Krishna (*Krishnacharitra*), Bankim remained preoccupied with questions like whether or not Krishna had multiple wives or the 'profound' allegory that lay behind his scandalous stealing of women's garments as described in the *Bhagavat Purana*. Modern Hinduism, in other words, discursively reinforced the figure of Krishna while taking away in good measure, the human spontaneity and charm that traditional images of this god evoked.

This collection of Krishna stories put together by Shanta Rameshwar Rao adopts an interesting mix of the historical and the hagiographical. In a sense, this work reads like a biography even when interspersed with superhuman feats and extraordinary anecdotes. Beginning with the tale of his birth and the secret transference to another locality, it leads us through a succession of stories [about 20 in all] until we reach the point when the god dies very much like an ordinary man, a victim of time and human avarice. Perhaps it is not fortuitous after all that the hunter whose fatal arrow killed Krishna is called Jara [senility, disease/old age]. These stories narrate major events and occurrences in the life of Krishna and the tribe of Yadavas while at Gokula, Mathura and Vrindavana. Through these we encounter a god in his various human manifestations—as an adorable infant, lover, friend, King, hero, philosopher and teacher. I suspect that it is this vivacious multiplicity of roles he enacts that makes Krishna such a potent character for poets and bardic composers. By comparison, Rama, even as an incarnation of Vishnu, has not inspired the writing of a single *Purana*. The latter was perhaps a god who was much too perfect to encourage folk imagination or poetic license.

In the absence of any prefatory remarks it is not clear as to exactly what textual/non-textual sources these stories are based on. My reasoned guess, however, is that they are largely drawn from the *Mahabharata*, the *Harivamsa* and the major *Puranas*. Tales related to Krishna occur in at least 9 of the 18 major *Puranas* but apparently, the single most important source followed here is the *Bhagavata Purana*, sometimes at the expense of other works in this class. Thus, if Rao were to prefer the *Brahmavaivarta Purana*, the story relating to Radha's marriage (# 7) would have to be significantly recast since here, Radha, clearly through some late interpolation, appears as Krishna's lawfully wedded wife.[1] However, it seems as though the *Bhagavat* too has been modified at places. Thus in the Puranic description of Krishna's death, there is a clear suggestion of the god assuming the form of the four armed Vishnu (*Bhagavata Purana*: XI: xxv : 28)—a fact altogether omitted by Rao's text and the supporting illustration. At least at an academic level I remain curious as to whether it was narrative strategy or a choice of different sources that determined this change.[2]

The outstanding quality about this work—and I have not seen too many in this class, is its extremely evocative prose which, I imagine, has partly arisen in its social imagination and great sensitivity for contexts. At places I had the eerie feeling of reading through some contemporary account, wondering if the narrator herself was not some gopi transported across time! Though familiar with most stories of this collection, I have enormously enjoyed going through Shanta Rameshwar Rao's brilliant retelling. It is a collection that I am delighted to recommend to both adults and adolescents for what it offers by way of *rasa* and narrative elegance. However, I would be greatly remiss if I did not also mention the breathtakingly beautiful paintings by Bulbul Sharma that have been especially commissioned for this collection. It would have been nice though if we had also had a pictorial representation of Krishna assuming the Virat Rupa on the eve of the Kurukshetra War. That, incidentally, would have also brought forth the discursive Krishna that continues to be valued in some circles.■

Reference

1 The *Bhagavat Purana* itself does not clearly mention a female character by the name of Radha though there are hints of a certain gopi whom Krishna was particularly fond of. If I recall correctly, Radha first occurs in a Prakrit anthology attributed to the c.7th century poet, Hala.

2 Another fact that Rao's retelling omits is the death of Balaram, Krishna's brother. In the *Bhagavat,* Krishna decides to give up his life upon learning that his brother too has descended into Patala.

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I, Chandra Chari, hereby declare that particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

The Story is The Thing

Pradip Bhattacharya

THE MAHABHARATA OF VYASA: THE COMPLETE ADI PARVA
Transcreated from Sanskrit by P. Lal
Writers Workshop, Kolkata, 2005, pp. 1218, price not stated.

THE MAHABHARATA
By Meera Uberoi
Penguin, New Delhi, 2005, pp.472, Rs.300.00

AFTER KURUKSHETRA
By Mahasweta Devi
Seagull, Kolkata, 2005, pp.49, Rs.120.00

Shells were exploding over Leningrad. Enemy bombs were falling on the streets stirring up clouds of dust. On one of those spring days during the siege, Sanscrit language was being heard in the building of the Academy of Sciences on the Neva River embankment, in a room overlooking the side that was safer during the artillery strikes. First, in the original, and then in translation, Vladimir Kalyanov, a specialist on India, was reading *Mahabharata,* a wonderful monument of Indian literature, to his colleagues, who remained in the besieged city. He had started the translation before the war. He translated during the hard winter of 1941, with no light, no fuel and no bread in the city. Two volumes of books—one published in Bombay and the other in Calcutta—were lying on the table in the room. In the dim light of a wick lamp, he was comparing these two editions of *Mahabharata,* trying to find the best and the most accurate translation of the Sanscrit into Russian…The translation of the Indian epic into Russian was never interrupted.[1]

What is it in this epic-of-epics, eight times larger than the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* combined—denounced as "a literary monster" by Winternitz, and as "monstrous chaos" by Oldenberg—that appeals so irresistibly to the modern man in search of his soul, when the audience for which it was composed—the enthroned monarch and the forest-dwelling sage—has long sunk into the dark abyss of time? Vyasa, master raconteur, weaves together a bewildering skein of threads to create a many-splendoured web from which there was no escape for the listener of those days and there is none even for the reader of today. The thousands of years that separate us from Vyasa have not, surprisingly, dimmed the magic of his art that had entranced Janamejaya and Shaunaka.

We find here a storyteller *par excellence* laying bare, at times quite pitilessly, the existential predicament of man in the universe. If, later in the epic, Vyasa shows us what man has made of man, here, in the very first book, he plumbs the depths of the humiliatingly petty preoccupations of the Creator's noblest creation. Indeed, the dilemmas the characters find themselves enmeshed in cannot even be glorified as 'tragic'. Perhaps, that is why we find the epic so fascinating—for, how many of us are cast in the heroic mould? We do not have to strain the imagination to reach out and identify with Yayati or Shantanu. We need no willing suspension of disbelief to understand why the brahmin Drona should sell his knowledge to the highest bidder, or why Drupada does not protest too much when his daughter is parcelled out among five brothers who had routed him in a skirmish. Passions do, indeed, spin the plot and we are betrayed by what is false within.

If we resonate in empathy with the sense of tears in human things, we also thrill with joy on meeting the indomitable spirit of woman in an epic that many misconceive as celebrating a male chauvinist outlook. Whether it is Shakuntala proudly asserting her integrity and berating the mean-minded Dushyanta in open court; or Devayani demanding that Kacha return her love and imperiously brushing aside a lust-crazed husband; or Kunti refusing to pervert herself into a mindless son-producing machine to gratify the twisted desires of a frustrated husband—time and again it is the woman standing forth in all the splendour of her spirited autonomy as a complete human being that rivets our attention and evokes our admiration.



This transcreation by P. Lal—Padma Shri awardee, Jawaharlal Nehru Fellow and Mircea Eliade Professor—allows the epic to grow on the reader through 19 chapters without any critical paraphernalia, for "the story's the thing, catching the conscience of commoner and king" as he writes so perceptively. A companion volume contains the individual prefaces, notes and glossaries to the 26 fascicules of the original edition.[2] This is the only English rendering that follows the Sanskrit text of the epic verse by verse as it is current today in all the recensions—"the full ragbag version" as he puts it—eschewing the not very consistent text of the Critical Edition that J.A.B.van Buitenen translates with its numerous excisions. Unlike the 19th century translators K.M. Ganguli and M.N. Dutt, Lal neither omits sexual passages "for obvious reasons", nor Latinizes them. It is also the sole translation that is a transcreation, consciously aiming at providing a sense of the original by effortlessly shifting from lyrical verse to trenchant prose as Vyasa's text demands, while preserving the Sanskrit ethos. It is a transcreation meant to be heard, for that is what the hermits in the Naimisha forest were doing. Lal himself has been giving public readings of his transcreation every Sunday from October 1999 bringing home the oral and aural quality of the epic. How true are Vyasa's prophetic words in the *Adivamsavatarana* ("Down comings") chapter:

What is in this epic
on Dharma, Artha, Kama, Moksha,
may be elsewhere.
What is not in this epic,
is nowhere else…
It is recited in the present,
it will be recited in the future.

Each generation appears to need its own version of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* in language that it can relate to. In the last couple of years Ramesh Menon has retold both *in extenso* (Harper Collins and Rupa publications running to nearly 900 and 1600 pages respectively). Now Penguin India has published a re-issue of Meera Uberoi's abridgement (Ratna Sagar1996). Based on the K.M. Ganguli translation of the 1880s, this is a linear version following the straight path of the Pandava-Dhartarashtra conflict, eschewing everything that gives the epic its enduring place in our cultural memory. Even the short passages of exquisite poetry that Vyasa's narration is shot through with are absent because Ganguli's is an exclusively prose translation. Take, for instance, Section XXVI (the burning of Khandava

forest) that begins with Krishna and Arjuna on a picnic beside the Yamuna. Uberoi despatches this in just two and a half sentences.

Or take the organic tree image in terms of which the epic is figured forth, with each parva described appropriately as a different part of the massive *ashvattha* tree, an image that is extended to symbolize the Dhartarashtra-Pandava conflict; or the exquisite self-exculpatory and revelatory lament of Dhritarashtra with its haunting refrain *tada na shamse vijayaya Sanjaya* that occurs in the first parva summing up the Pandavas' major exploits and the reasons for their victory. With Draupadi being as much the *cause celebre* of the holocaust as Helen was for burning the topless towers of Ilium, it is difficult to appreciate why Uberoi leaves out Vyasa's description of her emergence, particularly when she is the only woman he describes in any detail in this ocean of characters:

eye-ravishing Panchali,
black-and-smiling-eyed...
Dark-skinned Panchali,
Lotus-eyed lady,
Wavy-haired Panchali
Hair like dark blue clouds,
Shining coppery carved nails,
Soft eye-lashes,
Swelling breasts and
Shapely thighs...
Blue lotus
Fragrance for a full krosha
Flowed from her body (P. Lal transcreation)

The miraculous birth of Draupadi, appearing unasked, full-grown, accompanied by an announcement that she would cause the destruction of Kshatriyas, robs the linear storyline of its ominous overtones. To bring home to the reader the key role played by Draupadi in the destruction of the Dhartarashtras, it was necessary to include her brilliant haranguing of the court-elders, her marshalling of scriptural and political treatises to goad the Pandavas constantly during the exile and the skilful use of her sexuality with Bhima in Virata's kitchen to motivate him to kill Kichaka. Even Krishna's stirring words reassuring her when her husbands (save Sahadeva) are suing for peace are left out.

Consider those you disfavour
As already dead!...
The Himavant hills may move, the
Earth shatter
In a hundred pieces, heaven collapse;
My promise stands...
You will see your enemies killed. (V.82.45, 48, P. Lal transcreation)

From two opposing sides a remarkable tribute is paid to her that Uberoi omits. Both Karna and Krishna praise her for having, like a boat, rescued her husbands who were drowning in the ocean of misery in the assembly hall. The delightful marital byplay between Draupadi and Arjuna over his return from exile with Subhadra in tow has been turned into her "icy rage". Here is the original:

Go son of Kunti,
where she of the Satvatas is!
A second knot loosens the first,
however tightly re-tied.
(I.220.17—P. Lal transcreation)

The cosmic dimensions that underpin the epic and lend it a memorability far beyond a fratricidal war are completely absent, particularly the all-encompassing metaphor of Time with which the epic begins. Even if we look for the simple linear tale, Uberoi misses out why the *Mahabharata* is celebrated as encyclopaedic and Sauti's brilliant summary of the epic's highlights:

It tells the story of the greatness of the house of Kuru, the goodness of Gandhari, the wisdom of Vidura, the constancy of Kunti; it describes the divinity of Krishna, the honesty of the five Pandavas, and the misdeeds of the sons of Dhritarashtra. (P. Lal)

That is how the epic appeared to the narrator and there has not been much change in the audience-appreciation even today. Uberoi also omits Vyasa's moral perspective. The Dhartarashtras and Pandavas are described in the very first parva, *Anukramanika*, in terms of giant trees, one born of passion, the other of Dharma; the root of the one is the weak-minded Dhritarashtra, that of the other Krishna, Brahma and Brahmins.

In the account of Bhishma abducting the three Kashi princesses, Uberoi leaves out his trouncing Shalva though it explains why the humiliated king rejects Amba when she approaches him, while devoting several pages to the Bhishma-Parashurama episode that adds nothing to the linear plot. Further, Duryodhana, scoffed at by Bhima when he crowns Karna ruler of Anga, retorts crushingly that the dubious births of the Pandavas are well known, revealing that the Dhartarashtras considered the five brothers parvenus and pretenders, which Uberoi omits.

Vyasa is not a poet who glosses over the facts of life. Quite bluntly he states that sexual over-indulgence led to Vichitravirya's premature death, that Pandu preferred erotic pleasures with his wives to ruling the kingdom, that Ganga's sexual skills kept Shantanu enslaved. Uberoi avoids all such references throughout. Often one wonders what is the audience she has in mind, particularly when she reduces the *Gita* to a dreary chapter the reader prefers to skip over instead of the dynamic cut-and-thrust of question and answer that it is. Uberoi deprives the reader of a key feature of the war famed as *dharma-yuddha* (chivalrous fighting): Bhishma lays down rules of righteous engagement that are violated the moment Drona takes over.

The abridgement is not sensitive to the delicate hints Vyasa provides. Thus, when Pandu asks Kunti to summon Dharma for a son, the epic states that when the god asked her what she wanted, she smiled and answered, "A son". But there is no such smile indicating familiarity and ease when Vayu and Indra are invoked. The special relationship between Dharma (of whom Vidura, her brother-in-law is an avatara) is something that is hinted at. This comes to the fore again when the Pandavas return to Hastinapura having won Draupadi and Kunti addresses Vidura with great emotion, assuring him that she has taken good care of his sons. Uberoi omits both passages as also Kunti's thrilling exhortation to her sons to fight for their rights, narrating the inspiring story of Vidula telling her cowardly son to flare up like *tinduka* wood even for an instant instead of living out a long inglorious life. Uberoi has omitted the reason she gives her sons for her astonishing departure from the kingdom so sorely won by them, as also the peculiar death of Vidura witnessed by Yudhishthira. Kunti's remarkable fortitude in bringing up her sons singlehandedly, planning all the while for winning back their inheritance, is another casualty. In the house of lac it is Kunti who gets a Nishada woman and her five sons drunk, leaving them to be burnt alive, to throw Duryodhana off the track. It is she who realizes that an alliance with Hidimba will strengthen them and overrules Yudhishthira's objections to her marrying Bhima. When Ghatotkacha is born, she takes care to educate him in his responsibilities to assist the Pandavas.

Apparently Uberoi did not feel it necessary to revise her 1996 text, otherwise we would not have come across errors like "kshatri" instead of "kshatta" for Vidura (p.57), "Parankoti" for "Pramankoti" (p.54), "Brihannala" (!) being killed by Abhimanyu instead of Brihadbala (p.352) and again "Brihannala" as the name of one of the five villages the Pandavas offered to be content with (p.272), "Draupada" instead of Drupada all through, "Duryodhana" instead of Satyaki of the Satvatas (p.255), Arjuna's chariot incinerating on his stepping down instead of when Krishna alights (p.413), Karna asking for Indra's *vajra* instead of his infallible dart (*shakti*) 221. Krishna, Bhima and Arjuna do not enter Girivraja "surreptitiously" (131), but after breaking three massive drums and punching an entrance through a wall. When Ashvatthama attacks the Panchala camp, Uberoi has him bypass a rakshasa sentinel, whereas in Vyasa Rudra guards the camp and lets the murderous Brahmin in after he has offered to sacrifice himself.

The Introduction needed amplification, particularly in view of the linear design adopted, to provide the reader with a larger view such as *leit motifs* and themes that are the warp and the woof weaving the vast narrative together. The Epilogue is rather unsatisfactorily put together besides omitting critical facts such as the arrowhead that killed Krishna being made from the cursed iron pestle, Vyasa advising Arjuna that it is time they leave the world, Agni demanding the return of the celestial bow and quivers from Arjuna.

Comparisons are odious, but Menon does do a better job diction-wise for the 21st century reader than Uberoi who, while being better than R.K. Narayan's pedestrian summary of the epic, is readable but not gripping.

Anjum Katyal's richly satisfying translation of Mahasweta Devi's three pieces on the epic calls to mind two other great creations: Buddhadeb Basu's *Kalsandhya*, a poetic drama on the destruction of the Yadavas and Arjuna's discomfiture at the hands of staff-wielding dacoits, and Dharmavir Bharati's *Andha Yug* on the end of the war. Mahasweta Devi typically portrays what Vyasa never touches upon: what did the war mean to the proletariat, specially the women?

Panchakanya ("Five Women") is a superb portrayal of the plight of the widows of ordinary farmers and artisans pressed into service, contrasting their resilience with the effete royalty of the Pandava queens by a masterly stroke in which the pregnant, sorrowing Uttara is provided with five ordinary widows as companions to divert her mind.

Lokavritta (the folk way of life) and *Rajavritta* (the life of the rulers) are thrown into powerful contrast. The low class women—tribal or otherwise—do not remain widows, because life must go on and if they do not bear children, cultivate the fields, grind the grain, society will collapse. So, they elect to leave the palace and seek out new husbands. There is a fine passage in which Kunti sharply asks Draupadi—who is endlessly condemning the Kauravas—whether she has ever looked at the Kaurava women, husband-and-son-less. 'Kunti and the Nishadin' brings face-to-face the killer of a tribal woman and her five sons with that woman's daughter-in-law when Kunti is eking out her last days in the forest. Just as those tribals were burnt alive in the house of lac, so is Kunti in a forest fire along with Gandhari and Dhritarashtra. Before that climax, there is an engrossing portrayal of Kunti's ceaseless angst over Karna. Mahasweta Devi, however, does take it to an extreme when she has Kunti cogitate that she never thought of doing anything on her own. The entire upbringing of the Pandavas and rallying them to battle for their inheritance were her achievements alone. There is a minor error when Kunti laments that Karna was known as a carpenter's son (p.29).

'Souvali' celebrates the nameless Vaishya maid who was the mother of Dhritarashtra's sole surviving son, Yuyutsu, as Buddhadeb Basu did with the unnamed mother of Vidura in his memorable *Anamni Angana*. Preferring to stay outside the city with her own people, when her neighbours come to help her observe the fasting rituals on Dhritarashtra's death, Souvali says: "I'll feast on sweet kheer laddoos, ghee-rich jowar pithas, golden honey. And after I'm full, I'll sleep peacefully, holding my son in my arms." There is a piercing comment on Vyasa who, she has heard will write about this righteous war: "So let him! Souvali doesn't want even a mention of her name anywhere." Indeed, she remains nameless in the epic. The slim volume of under fifty pages is a rewarding and thought provoking read indeed.■

Reference

[1] http://www.300.years.spb.ru/eng/3_spb_3.html?id=5

[2] A detailed examination of the entire Adi Parva transcreation is available in P. Bhattacharya, *Themes and Structure in the Mahabharata: the Adi Parva* (Dasgupta & Co., Calcutta).

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Multiplicity as Strength and Vulnerability

Vinod C. Khanna

RETELLING THE RAMAYANA: VOICES FROM KERALA
By C.N. Srikantan & Sarah Joseph. Translated from Malayalam by Vasanthi Sankaranarayanan
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 157, Rs. 250.00

This slim volume provides the reader more than what the title page promises. Besides the immensely readable English translations by Vasanthi Sanakaranarayanan of 'Ramayana retellings' by two outstanding contemporary Malayalam literary figures, we have the very useful author's and translator's notes, as well as a lucid introduction and highly informative *Afterword* (on the *Ramayana* in Kerala) by the well-known scholar and literary figure, K.Satchidanandan.

The translator's note tells us how she became "disenchanted with the myth of the ideal man"(Rama/Raman), a process reinforced by growing acquaintance with feminism and the women's perspective. This is the background to her being attracted to Sarah Joseph's short stories which she sees as "not mere subversions of the original, but a modern and feministic reinterpretation of the Ramayanam itself." The translator also goes on to explain why she agreed with the OUP suggestion to include in the volume Nair's *Kanchana Sita* (the Golden Sita). Like Joseph's stories, this play is, Vasanthi tells us, not only pro-woman, but part of the "subversion of the Ramayanam" in Kerala, and presentation of a new interpretation.

Kanchana Sita is a powerful play, whose appeal transcends any 'subversive' intent its eminent playwright may have had. What we have here is a dramatic confrontation between love and politics, between human values and duties of a ruler, as defined by the royal priests. The latter come across as ruthless and heartless arbiters of even Rama's destiny. Torn between his intense love for the exiled Sita (at this stage Rama is unaware that she has survived the dangers of the jungle) and the demand of his priestly mentors that he marry a second time so that he can perform the Ashwamedha sacrifice, he turns to Lakshmana and asks

> Do you think Raman's hands will move to touch another woman?
> His brother's helpless response is a mere :O Maharajan!
> Rama, in a line which captures the depth of his despair, exclaims: Maharajan! A synonym for the killer of his own soul.

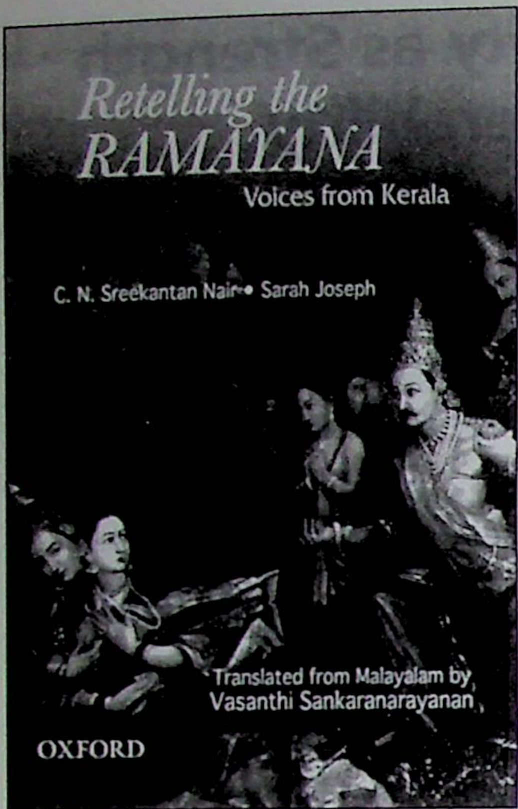
The highlights of the play of course is the questioning of Rama from various perspectives, (including that of Bharata, Hanuman and Valmiki i.e. not limited to a specific feminist point of view) of which the most memorable lines have been given to Lakshmana's wife and Sita's sister, Urmila. Reacting to Rama and Lakshmana's elevation of the so-called ' will of the people' to the status of the supreme guiding principle for royal behaviour, she asks

> Which is greater, oh great king! The untruthful will of the people or the truth itself? ……
> And who decides the will of the people!

She goes on to bring into bold relief the immoral consequence of Rama's exiling of Sita simply on the basis of some slanderous remarks of a few :

> What protection does a chaste and pure woman have in this Ayodhya?...don't forget that tomorrow you may be labelled as the one who showed the way for heartless men to drive their wives out.

Rama's treatment of Sita has been castigated from within the mainstream *Ramayana* texts long before the modern 'subversive' texts. In the Old Javanese *Ramayana*, written more than thousand years ago, Trijata, who here is a young daughter of Vibhishana and loyal companion of Sita during her



incarceration in Lanka, has this to say to Rama when he repudiates her after triumphing over Ravana,

"My lord, you go too far. You are like a blind man, though adept in all the teachings of religion. The princess has no equal in the world, concerning faithfulness and devotion to my lord...

..if your heart is wicked and cruel, impure, irrational, then I doubt very much that you can protect the world because then you become sinful, corrupted by impurities..."

The five *Ramayana Stories* of Sarah Joseph are very different from Nair's *Kanchana Sita.* Though Rama is sharply challenged in the play, Valmiki would recognize the characters, and indeed applaud them. Joseph's stories, on the other hand, are brilliant works of imagination, incorporating innovative feminist perspectives and contemporary ensibilities, but have very little to do with the Valmiki Ramayana.[1]

'Mother Clan' is the most powerful of the Joseph short stories. It is rrelevant to say that it is not fair to the *Valmiki Ramayana*. Hideous though the mutilation of Shurpanakha in it was, it was limited to cutting off the ears and nose—apparently the prescribed punishment for adultery in that age—and, furtheremore, came after she threatened Sita. Joseph, on the other hand, takes on from those later Ramayanas, like the *Kamba Ramayana* and the Malayalam *Adhyatma Ramayana*, where Shurpanakaha's breasts are slashed off as well, and this fact is fundamental to Joseph's reinterpretation of this episode. In searing prose, she gets Shurpanakha to castigate this inhuman act,

> They butchered the root and source of my breast milk. The roots of my clan and blood.......

Shurpanakha may not be the ideal case for feminists to champion, but the author makes the demoness hold Rama and Lakshmana guilty of punishing her for legitimate display of female sexuality.

The story ends in a brilliant juxtaposition of the fate of Shurpanakha with that of the chaste Sita. No wonder the demoness bursts into hysterical laughter!

Most moving is the story entitled 'What is Not in the Story'. Through a cleverly constructed conjunction of circumstances, Joseph brings together, in the presence of Valmiki, five children who themselves are innocent witnesses of the intrigues and horrors of the powerful adults: Rama's sons Lava and Kusha, on their way to sing the *Valmiki Ramayana* before those gathered at Rama's Ashwamedha sacrifice at Naimisaranyam, Unnni, the brahmin boy to revive whom Rama committed the heinous act of killing the Shudra Shambooka, and Shambooka's two children who too wish to sing at Rama's Ashwamedha sacrifice, but they would have liked to narrate the story of their father's death from their perspective.

Ramakatha has profited from constant questioning from different perspectives, particularly when such challenge raises important issues and in an aesthetically appealing form. These works of C.N. Sreekantan Nair and Sarah Joseph meet both these criteria. Vasanthi Sankaranarayanan and OUP deserve our thanks for making these available in English, and in such beautiful English at that.

So overwhelmingly popular was the Ramayana tradition, that through history a vast number of poets and artistes, folk and classical (a false dichotomy?) were irresistibly drawn to it and used it as a medium to reflect the ideology and social norms of their own gurus and rulers. So generous was the Ramayana tradition that it has allowed the use of its name and prestige to an amazing variety of works and today it has become increasingly common for scholars to regard them all as "authentic." A.K. Ramanujan captures this in his celebrated article 'Three Hundred Ramayanas' published in *Many Ramayanas* (ed.Paula Richman) . He likens the Ramayana tradition to a pool of signifiers, into which each author dips and "brings out a unique crystallization, a new text with a unique texture and a fresh context." But this phenomenon of multiplicity is both the strength and vulnerability of the Rama tale. What is subverted—most scathingly and deservedly by many of these retellings —is not the Ramayana tradition *per se* but the unjust social order—oppressing women and the lower castes— which the ruling classes, castes and patriarchs created in India over the subsequent two millennia or so and which was often reflected, indeed glorified, by some of the later Ramayanas or in the later additions to the *Valmiki Ramayana* itself.[2]

Reference

[1] The status which Valmiki has enjoyed through history was not bestowed upon him by the arbitrary whim of some powerful ruler or dominant caste. It springs quite simply from the quality of his work and its chronological primacy.[1] However, there is no reason to project the Valmiki Ramayana as a normative text, *the* definitive Ramayana.

[2] Thus, for instance, the Uttarakanda , which covers the second exiling of Sita and the killing of the low caste Shambooka to revive the brahmin boy, is widely regarded as a later addition.

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Cinderellas of Archaeological Explorations

Tulsi Vatsal

BUDDHIST CENTRES OF ORISSA: LALITAGIRI, RATNAGIRI AND UDAYAGIRI
By Bimal Bandyopadhyay
Sundeep Prakashan, New Delhi, pp. 100, Rs.1500.00

For most people, the term 'Buddhist monuments of India' automatically brings to mind the Sanchi stupa and the magnificent cave complex at Ajanta; or perhaps the medieval monastery at Nalanda. Names like Lalitagiri, Ratnagiri and Udayagiri in all probability draw a blank.

This is not altogether surprising. Although these three centres, located in a chain of low hills in the Cuttack (present Jajpur) district of Orissa, are the sites of monastic complexes which in their scale and grandeur rival Nalanda, they have unfortunately been the 'Cinderellas of Indian archaeological exploration'. Forgotten for centuries in impenetrable jungles, the three sites were first described in detail by C. S. Banerjee, District Magistrate of Jajpur, way back in 1870. For the next few decades, a number of government officials and scholars visited the sites. Their reports tell a sorry story of neglect and indifference. In 1875, John Beames, Magistrate of Cuttack described the remains of Lalitagiri and Udayagiri as 'a perfect mine of archaeology, and one which has not been thoroughly explored.' He ordered the removal of a massive and beautifully carved gateway from Udayagiri, to be set up in the public gardens of Cuttack. (The gateway is now housed in the Cuttack museum.) This was just as well. More than 50 years later, in 1928, when H. C. Chakladar, a lecturer from the University of Calcutta visited Udayagiri, he found that around the ancient well there was nothing but the 'debris of shrines and statues': most of the sculptures noted by earlier visitors had long since been looted by local zamindars and treasure hunters; ancient structures demolished to contruct a modern math; the whole site used as a quarry for railway construction. Chakladar lamented: 'The marvellous sculptures on these hills that deserve to be recognized as some of the finest art-treasures of India have remained scattered in obscure and neglected ruins…'

It was between 1958-61 that excavations were finally undertaken at Ratnagiri by the Eastern Circle of the Archaeological Survey of India, under the able direction of D. Mitra. Lalitagiri was not so fortunate. Here, the excavation carried out by the Utkal University in 1977, 'was of small scale' and due to the 'inadequacy of published data' very little information could be gleaned from it. In fact, it is only in the last twenty years that systematic excavations have been carried out by the ASI, both at Lalitagiri (between 1985-6 and 1997-2000), and at Udayagiri (1985-9 and 1997-2000).

The results of these excavations is astounding. They revealed the existence of extensive and elaborate monasteries with unique architectural features, Buddhist shrines, scores of stupas of all shapes and sizes, and a wealth of sculpture dating from the 6th to the 13th centuries, with Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and other Buddhist deities placed in temples and on stupas, and carved on the hillsides.

Despite the treasures that have been unearthed by archaeologists, the available published data is 'very sketchy'. The challenge, as Bimal Bandyopadhyay saw it, was to fill out the picture, and 'to bring out the background and results of the scholarly pursuits at the sites in one volume in an easily understandable form'.

Bimal Bandyopadhyay headed the excavation undertaken by Branch IV of the ASI at Udayagiri at the complex described as Udayagiri 2. His book describes much more than an archaeological report. Bandyopadhyay explains how the study of these sites not only throws new light on the history of Buddhism in Eastern India, it also challenges earlier held views of the history of Orissan art. According to general belief, between the carvings at Udagiri and Khandagiri near Bhubaneshwar dated to the Sunga period, and the Hindu temples at Bhubaneshwar of the 7th century CE, there was 'a lull in the field of art.' According to the author, a close study of the images of Lalitagiri, dispels this view.

One of the most frustrating things about studying these sites is the virtual absence of contemporary written records. Epigraphical information is also scanty, and the task of the historian is to try and integrate 'stray finds and discoveries' from the three sites, and combine them with bits of information from inscriptions and later Buddhist texts, in order to 'reflect the gradual growth and the transition of Buddhism in Orissa.' This is the subject matter of Chapter 1.

While it is clear that certain specific issues, such as the identity of one King Buddhapaksha, who is credited with founding the Ratnagiri complex; or the question whether Shivakaradeva of the Bhauma Kharas dynasty was the same ruler who sent an autographed Buddhist manuscript to the Chinese emperor, require further scholarly study, the author offers a plausible and useful outline of the history of the settlements. Of the three, Lalitagiri is the oldest, revealing continuous occupation from the 2nd century BCE to 11th-12th centuries CE. Ratnagiri and Udaygiri were founded somewhat later; and all three establishments were at the height of their glory between the 8th and 10th centuries, thanks probably to the patronage of the Bhauma Kharas dynasty, whose first three rulers are specifically mentioned as being Buddhists in the Neulpur copper charter. Thereafter the monasteries at Lalitagiri and Udayagiri show lack of maintenance and sculptural decline; but Ratnagiri not only continued to flourish, it became a centre of Vajrayana Buddhism, especially its Kakachakrayana offshoot, and was the university of choice of great Buddhist scholars like Naropa.

The archaeological finds are described in detail in Chapter 3. Highlights at Lalitagiri include three caskets discovered in the remains of the main stupa, which, according to the author, may very possibly contain the relics of the Buddha himself and of his chief disciples; a unique apsidal chaitya hall in the early Andhra style; and a number of finely carved images, including two standing Bodhisattva figures in the sculpture shed at Lalitagiri, which 'bear the indelible stamp of Gupta classicism'. At Ratnagiri, which is the most extensive of the three sites, there are two impressive monastery complexes; a large 10th century stupa, built around an earlier construction, and surrounded by stupas carrying one or four Buddha images in niches on the drums; and an array of figures in stone, terracotta and metal. Though, by and large, these figures are not of the same quality as the ones at Lalitagiri and Udayagiri, there are some notable exceptions (such as the seated Tara in the Ratnagiri museum). Besides, the sheer number and variety of the sculptures based on the prolific Vajrayana pantheon (several of these are discussed in detail), make this a treasure house for the study of Vajrayana iconography and art. The monastery at Udayagiri 2 is built along the same general plan as those on the other sites, but the two-storeyed structure is notable for certain novel architectural features, such as an ambulatory passage around the shrine chamber, an upper shrine on the first floor, and a vaulted passageway formed using long arches gateway was removed by Beams, but the central shrine still has a 2.60 metre-high image of a seated Buddha, ruined but still impressive.

Two caveats: The first is the lack of competent copy editing. The grammatical errors, the spelling mistakes, and awkward sentence construction are a needless source of irritation. The second concerns the description of the accounts of early travellers given in Chapter 1. Since these travellers each had his own way of describing the geographical location of the monuments and images, it is often not possible to get a clear picture of which particular structures and figures are being referred to. It may have been preferable to focus separately on each of the three sites, provide a clear link between the accounts of successive visitors, and compare them to what has been discovered during the recent explorations. This would help the reader to know, for instance, whether the 'colossal image of Buddha… fully nine feet in height' located 'at the foot of the hill' at Udayagiri, reported by Banerjee, is the same as 'a statue of Buddha upwards of 8 feet high' in 'the bay formed between the south-eastern and north-eastern peaks of Udayagiri' seen by John Beames. Is this figure still in situ? Is it in some museum, or has it disappeared?

Buddhist Centres of Orissa, which includes 59 plates and two site maps of the Udayagiri 2 complex throws welcome light on a neglected but very important part of Orissa's cultural heritage.■

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Worshipping Shrinathji

Kavita Singh

MATERIALS, METHODS & SYMBOLISM IN THE PICHHWAI PAINTING TRADITION OF RAJASTHAN
By Desmond Peter Lazaro
Mapin Publishing, Ahmedabad, 2005, pp. 204, price not stated.

Pichwai painting is one of the best documented painting traditions in India. There have been several studies of pichhwai painting's background, themes and iconography, such as Robert Skelton's *Rajasthani Temple Hangings of the Krishna Cult* (1973), Talwar and Krishna's *Indian Pigment and Paintings on Cloth* (1979) and Amit Ambalal's *Krishna as Shrinathji* (1987). There has been, amazingly, a study of pichhwai painters by a psychoanalyst interested in the perceptions and meaning of creativity in a tradition-bound community (Ronaldo Maduro's fascinating *Artistic Creativity in a Brahmin Painter Community*, 1976). There has been a wonderful, intensely detailed study of the chief artist families in Nathadwara, in Tryna Lyons' *The Artists of Nathadwara* (2004). Further, the cult that pichhwai paintings serve, that of Krishna as Shrinathji, the Vallabha Sampradaya to which it belongs, and their philosophy of *shuddhadwaita* have all been studied by historians, religious historians and anthropologists, whose work then feeds into and off the studies of the remarkable paintings as well. Among the more innovative studies relating painting, religious philosophy and ritual are several essays by Woodman Taylor, including a major one in *Gods Kings and Tigers* edited by Stuart Cary Welch (1997). In Adding to this corpus, Desmond Peter Lazaro should have had a hard act to follow. There seems so little ground left to cover that a new entrant to the field would be hard pressed to find an area to call his own.

Why has pichhwai painting attracted so much attention when so many important courtly painting traditions have hardly one or two studies worth the name? For one thing, the paintings can be utterly wonderful, and their large scale – upto six feet square – serves to make them more 'approachable'. In pichhwai there are large areas of beautiful colour and bold, easily grasped motifs – fish, lotus, tree, cow, gopi, god. Even when the details of the iconography and content are not known it is not difficult to grasp the concept – this one sets the scene for a lush bower, this one shows worshippers gazing adoringly at their god. There is none of the 'for-connoisseurs-only' sense that attaches to miniature paintings from princely courts, where the artist hides tiny details or conjures up elliptical narrativizations to tease the jaded connoisseur's eye. For another thing, pichhwais arise out of a fascinating context, and the paintings are part of a cult that believes that the sense pleasures that please man will please god, so he should be surrounded by music, incense, delicious food, rich clothes and his shrine should be hung with paintings. It is hard, even for a bone-dry scholar to resist such a philosophy. And what must attract scholars even more is that the tradition is still living: very few artists may be producing the highest quality paintings, but there are enough members of traditional artist families alive and working in Nathadwara – the cult center— to provide a magnet to which scholars are ineluctably drawn. A fourth feature which is bound to increase the attention that is paid to Nathadwara is its role in the production of popular or calendar art. The town's painters, finding patronage drying up for their traditional work, turned to producing paintings and collages for other markets; the 'sceneries', collages and icons that they made for mass production are becoming increasingly well known and increasingly collectible.

For readers who know little about pichhwai paintings, and have suffered the above paragraphs with mounting impatience, here is some background information. The term 'pichhwai', which literally means 'something behind' or 'backdrop' are large-sized paintings on cloth that are made to hang behind the icon of Shrinathji. 'Shrinathji' is the name given to a particular image

...pichhwais arise out of a fascinating context, and the paintings are part of a cult that believes that the sense pleasures that please man will please god, so he should be surrounded by music, incense, delicious food, rich clothes and his shrine should be hung with paintings. It is hard, even for a bone-dry scholar to resist such a philosophy.

of Krishna, which is said to have emerged miraculously on Mount Govardhan in the 16th century. The image came into the care of Vallabhacharya, a great bhakti saint who emphasized the worship of Krishna as a child, encouraging worshippers to adopt the attitude of loving and playful seva, offering every comfort and pleasure that a beloved child might want. Thus Vallabhacharya's followers awaken their icon each morning with song and breakfast; the day proceeds with changes of clothes, and offerings of meals, more music, toys. On festivals, elaborate enactments are mounted to bring the festival to the icon: the priests play holi with the icon, and at the peak of summer they organize jal-krida or water games, by flooding the shrine and setting toy boats afloat and scattering lotuses on the water. In his philosophical writings, Vallabhacharya enfolded this playful and joyous worship within a vision of the world as entirely a part of the Divine: shuddhadvaita or pure non-dualism that sees all matter as a manifestation of God. Far from dismissing the material world as maya, the Vallabha Sampradaya delights in it, and further believes that *god* delights in it. This gives rise to the rich material culture surrounding Shrinathji, including the pichhwai paintings that adorn his shrine. The pichhwai function as theatrical backdrops for the theatre of the temple's rituals. They bring the world into the shrine, be it the dark clouds of the monsoon or the superb full moon of the winter months. Typically, a pichhwai 'assumes' the presence of an icon that it will hang behind, and paints the things that surround him, including trees, mountains, gopis and cows. Pichhwais are changed each day, or sometimes several times a day, helping to build scenes appropriate to the season or the festival at hand. Of course, other objects are also used to complete the 'set', including floral arrangements and three dimensional models and toys.

The cult originated in the Braj region but was affected by Aurangzeb's antipathy in the 18th century. Shrinathji – and his establishment -- were offered shelter by the Maharana of Mewar, but legend is that the cart carrying the icon repeatedly broke down at the small village nearby. The priests took this as a sign of Shrinathji's wish to stay, and established the cult center they called 'Nathadwara'. The place-name is thus almost synonymous with the cult – and with the associated style of painting — though in fact there are seats of great importance in a number of other sites in Rajasthan and central India; here other icons dating to the time of Vallabha's grandsons have their homes, and associated very fine painting traditions have sprung up there. In Nathadwara we know that two major painter communities, Brahmin and Jangid, have coexisted and competed with each other. In service of the cult they made not just the pichhwais that hang behind the shrine, but depictions of the icon *with* pichwais and priests, for pilgrims to take away. There are also manoratha ('longing' or 'desire') pictures which depict a worshipper in the presence of the icon.

Clearly then, pichhwais are a rich tradition and richly deserve the scholarly attention they have received. In what way does the book under review – Lazaro's *Materials Methods and Symbolism in the Pichhvai Painting Tradition of Rajasthan* – add to our knowledge? Lazaro's perspective and aims are different from those of any of the authors mentioned at the outset of this review. Lazaro writes not as a scholar but as an artist, who apprenticed himself to a traditional artist for twelve years and learned his technique. His aim thus is not to plumb the history of the tradition or to decode its iconography or read the images. His aim is to share with us the steps by which the painting is made – how the initial sketch is worked out; how

compositions are evolved, how pigments are made and applied; further, to communicate a sense to us of being in a traditional artist's studio.

It is unfortunate then, that Lazaro chose to publish a study of pichhwai painting based on his experience with an artist who is *not* a pichhwai painter. Lazaro apprenticed himself to Bannuji, a famous miniaturist from Jaipur who could work with great facility in any style. It appears from the book that Lazaro commissioned Bannuji to make three pichhwais, intensely documented the process of painting, and published the results as this book. Had Lazaro presented this book as a documentation of Bannuji's technique, one's reception of it would have been different; but the assertion, in the title and through the book, that this is a documentation of the pichhwai painting tradition causes some alarm. To honestly fulfil that project, the author should have worked with a pichhwai painter. It is not enough to state at the outset, as the author does, that 'the technique is the same as for miniature painting.' A book that deals with the technique of pichhwais should ideally look at the range of pichhwais, including those made at centers in Kishangarh, Kota or Surat; study changes in techniques and pigments over time; and also discuss mixed-technique works such as those that combine block printing or appliqué with painting. Certainly the rather New Age philosophizing about hidden yantras, ritualisitic significance of every act and the spiritual advancement of the painter would not be discussed so often had the author dealt with another painters who understood the tourist market less well.

Assuming that further editions of the book might bear a less misleading title, one can then try to assess the book as a record of an important miniaturist's technique. There have been other studies of pigments and methods, but this is by far the most lavishly illustrated and well produced, and is valuable in this regard. There are a number of interesting insights into miniature paintings in the chapter on pigments; for while demonstrating the use of colours, Bannuji has evidently discussed with the author the use of these pigments in older miniatures. A patient reading of this chapter would disclose many aspects of the painting of foliage, for instance, so richly achieved in so many different schools. Ultimately, this increases respect for the superb skills and techniques of miniature painters of old.■

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Introduction to Ethnomusicology

Amlan Dasgupta

THE TABLA OF LUCKNOW: A CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF A MUSICAL TRADITION
By James Kippen
Manohar Books, New Delhi, 2005, pp. i-xxvii+221, Rs 650.00

James Kippen's book on the tradition of tabla in Lucknow first came out in 1988, as part of the series of books entitled Cambridge Studies in Ethnomusicology. Re-reading the work at this distance dimly recreates the excitement of our introduction to ethnomusicology: for many of us, it was a new kind of writing on music, that generated both admiration and resistance strongly. Kippen's book in fact came when the first flush of passionate reaction had lessened; but earlier writing of the kind, like Regula Qureshi's study of the qawali, I well remember, raised questions about the music we loved and listened to that took time to settle down in our minds. There was above all a feeling of unfamiliarity.This was the music that we were completely immersed in and thought to be a part of our lives; but we found that it had become part of an anthropological vision, in which the way in which the performer sat, or the gestures of the audience were as important as the content of the music itself. The coexistence of what seemed absurdly trivial with valuable items of information or insight was bewildering. Was this then an approach that had nothing to say to those whose connection with Hindustani music was marked by as strong sense of *identity*, an unreflecting sense of belonging?

Rereading Kippen, I find that I have not really been able to settle this quandary. The book is in many respects admirable, based on considerable research and reflection. The writer was evidently closely associated with the world he describes and a disciple of one of the great masters of Lucknow tabla, and consequently there is much of value to an Indian student of music. At the same time, one feels—selfishly perhaps, for the book was not intended exclusively for an Indian public—that there is much which is either trite or oversimplified. On the other hand, if one assumes an audience with less exclusive musical interests, the analysis of the musical content of the Lucknow style is unlikely to make much meaning.

Kippen tries in this work to reconcile the divergent pulls of writing social history and a technical analysis of Lucknow tabla. The prefatory material, with an analysis of the specific stroking techniques of the style, accompanied by diagrams of finger positions, generates an expectation of an exhaustive treatment of the style in question. This however is only dealt with in the last section of the work (chapters 6-8) The book begins with a description of the city of Lucknow, and moves on to a brief account of the history of the city, concentrating on the period of the Avadh principate. The subsequent decline of the city's political fortunes is balanced against an account of the vibrant cultural life of the city. The need for compression means that Kippen can barely skim the surface of the subject: one also misses the presence of an attempt at critical evaluation of this cultural reputation. The section on the history of music in Lucknow seems sadly abbreviated.

Kippen affords greater space to the contemporary state of affairs in the musical world of Lucknow. It might be noted that even in the space of a decade and a half the account seems dated: the problems that Kippen describes as existing in the institutional practice and patronage of music have become far more pressing. He speaks of the importance of the All India Radio and the Doordarshan as offering relatively stable opportunities of both casual and permanent employment to musicians. Over the last few years the level of support offered by the radio has declined dramatically. The television has done little to make up for this: in fact the opportunities offered by television to North Indian music remain minimal. Nevertheless, the account that Kippen gives is interesting and instructive: in hindsight, it contains sufficient indication of the subsequent decline of the radio as a support base for classical musicians.

The educational institutions do not come off much better. Of those offering a formal education in music, the principal one is the redoubtable Bhatkhande College of Music, at the time of composition of the book the largest single employer of musicians in Lucknow. Nevertheless in the author's account it appears a sad and moribund place. Those interested in the earlier history of the College may find interesting material for reflection. The pedagogical principles established by Bhatkhande and continued by his immediate successors, were derived from a larger model of college and university education: but accounts of the early history of the Marris College emphasize the richness and depth of the musical training imparted there: the involvement of some of the greatest musicians of the times with the institution as advisers and examiners had much to do with that. The description of the other institutional loci of music similarly reveals a tired monotony; perhaps this is symptomatic of most such centres even today.

In Kippen's account, most Lucknow musicians, like their counterparts around the country, eke out a living through private tuition. This is potentially a fertile field for research, but there is little to hold attention in the brief section that is devoted to this topic. Even more dissatisfying is the following section on the tawaifs of Lucknow, and a reader who expects to

The chapters devoted to the style and content of the Lucknow style of tabla playing are for an informed Indian reader the principal attraction of the work. Of the three concluding chapters of the book, the first is predominantly sociological in focus, dealing with the relationship of teacher and student in the gharana system. The last two deal respectively with the distinctive technique of the Lucknow baaz and an analysis of the repertoire. Kippen gives a good account of the basic stroking techniques of his style, first of the main dahina and bayan strokes, single and combined, and then of the phrases or building blocks of tabla *bols*.

gain insight into the life strucures of the community are likely to be a little disappointed. Chapters 3 and 5 share themes in common, for one discusses the relationships among Lucknow musicians and the other popular perceptions of the tabla players. The latter also deals with the way tabla players have adjusted to popular expectations and demands. In many ways this is symptomatic of the musical profession as a whole, but Kippen can only scratch the surface of this subject, presumably because of the lack of space. There is however a brief but succinct discussion of the role of formal education in bringing about changes both in perceptions and practices of Indian classical music.

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The chapter on repertoire is predictably somewhat basic for tabla enthusiasts. Tabla players are notoriously averse to having their compositions made available publicly, and there are indications in Kippen's work that he was not given permission to notate the compositions in this work (p.150). The main example of *qaida* chosen is one that is not originally from Lucknow at all, but a famous Delhi composition, popular in all the major schools. The style of playing of course is subtly different in each style, and even in each major performer. In spite of the relative simplicity of the compositions cited, Kippen is able to convey a fair sense of the richness of the style that boasted of musicians like Khalifa Abed Husain and Khalifa Wajed Husain. The great exponent of the style in our times was Kippen's own Ustad, the late Afaq Husain Khansaheb. He is the source of information about technique and repertoire in this work, and thus the account has a special value for students of tabla.

If the purpose of the book is to give an idea of a leading school of tabla playing—one of the four traditionally recognized – for a musically inclined, but non-specialist, audience, the book is likely to be interesting in parts, and slightly incomprehensible in others. I have already indicated the problems that an Indian music student or enthusiast might have with the book. The clarity of Kippen's style and the evident love for his subject are however worthy of high praise, and the book deserves a fresh lease of attention. Unfortunately, the audio cassette supposed to accompany the book did not reach me, and I was deprived of the chance of hearing the renditions of the pieces notated in the work.■

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Contrasting Techniques

Lakshmi Subramanian

VIOLIN TECHNIQUES IN WESTERN AND SOUTH INDIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC: A COMPARATIVE STUDY
By M. Lalitha
Sundeep Prakashan, New Delhi, 2004, pp.292, Rs.1200.00

In this study of violin playing techniques in western classical and south Indian classical music Dr.Lalitha elaborates her understanding of contrasting techniques used in playing the violin in two distinct musical traditions. The violin was a late and foreign entrant in Indian classical music. The book in its framework and methodology adopts what one may identify as an ethnomusicological perspective. A catalogue of terms, of notations and scores and a wholly unimaginative analysis of the various schools of music identified with certain techniques of playing makes this book a strange mélange of musical description, which is devoid of any social or historical context. In a sense the arrangement of the book is somewhat typical of old fashioned scholarship on Indian music, that speaks inevitably of the intrinsically spiritual dimensions of music, and which makes no attempt whatsoever to incorporate more recent perspectives or to address some of the larger issues in the making of aesthetics and techniques in modern times.

The first chapter talks rather cursorily of what technique is meant in terms of the nature of artistic execution and what it is intended to produce, of the importance of bowing and left and right hand techniques in playing the violin, and is followed up in the subsequent chapters, by the various modes used in western classical and South Indian classical music. These techniques are elaborately described, some substantiated with notation and others without and are probably extremely useful for the player and the performer. In the section on South Indian music, the discussion of techniques of bowing and playing is reconstructed, not so much on the basis of musical score and notation that is understandably sparsely available, but on the basis of interviews with performers and the lineages they represented. What is missing is the history of these techniques and the rationale that informed them in the context of the nineteenth and early twentieth century experiment of embracing the violin and incorporating it within the classical music ensemble.

What was it about the violin that captured the imagination of early musicians and music lovers, urging an entire generation of amateurs in the early decades of the twentieth century to take up the instrument and offer teach yourself primers and graded exercises, and adapt it as an accompanying instrument in the newly designed concert or *kaccheri*. What was it about the violin's voice that made it so suitable as an accompanying instrument, what distinguished it say from the *sarangi* of Northern India and how did a lineage develop around it? These are some of the questions that would have made the study richer and would have connected the musical grammar in the book with a more general story making it more accessible to a range of readers. Many of us for instance are familiar with the modern legend of Chowdiah (1894-1967) and his seven stringed violin and how this was received by contemporaries and the controversies that his technique generated. Any appreciation of technique would ultimately have to address the issue of aesthetics, which again is contingent on ethical, moral and social meanings invested in a particular auditory experience and appreciation of a particular voice and its accompanying inflections. The author's proficiency with the violin would have made her an ideal interlocutor had she combined the study of techniques with a sociological and historical study of performance. In fact, any insightful study of music would require to adopt an interdisciplinary approach that makes use of historical material, recordings and interviews to tease out the more subtle questions of subjectivity, aesthetics and the shifting parameters of performance – a precondition that musicologists are coming to increasingly acknowledge.■

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A Sensitive Portrayal

Abhik Majumdar

HARIPRASAD CHAURASIA: ROMANCE OF THE BAMBOO REED
By Uma Vasudev
Shubhi Publications, Gurgaon, 2005, pp. 350, Rs. 495.00

Uma Vasudev's biography of Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia, the renowned flautist, comes across as a mixed bag. At one level, there is little to distinguish it from most run-of-the-mill hagiographical accounts of musicians and their lives. Other reviewers hold that it reads more like an autobiography. I feel compelled to agree; to my mind it comes across exactly like a ghosted autobiography written for some reason in the third person. And yet the book contains several strongly redeeming features. Hagiographical or not, it is a sensitively rendered portrayal of the maestro's life. More importantly, it manages to shed light on a crucial period in the history of Hindustani music.

The narrative starts on a rather drab note. It frequently tends towards the overblown and sentimental, which is underscored by the extensive use it makes of the active voice. In an autobiographical account, such a device comes across as perfectly normal. However, in a work rendered from a third-person perspective, it only serves to test our credibility. How, for example, is the author so sure about the exact words young Hariprasad's father employs when telling him of his mother's death?

Be that as it may, the maestro's early life was every bit as eventful as his later years. Born into a thoroughly unmusical family, the son of a renowned wrestler, he sustained his passion under the most harrowing of conditions. His father dreamt of making his son a champion wrestler, and would fly into a rage at any mention of music beyond votive *bhajans*. A kindly *dhrupad* singer who lived in the neighbourhood agreed to give him lessons on the sly. Young Hariprasad would leave the house on the pretext of going to the temple, and spend time with his mentor instead. As he grew older, he began to learn typing, and even secured a job as stenographer. This phase of his life ended with his getting radio assignments, and finally a job as staff artist.

The post-Independence era marked the end of princely states and the *zamindari* system, the traditional sources of benefaction for musicians. In their place, four new institutions of patronage began to assume significance, namely the radio (and other government agencies), cinema, the concert circuit and, eventually, record companies. Chaurasia's career also began from around that time. In successive stages, he drew sustenance from each of them. Through the maestro's eyes, the text provides us a unique first-hand account of these bodies and their evolution. The first is singled out for especial attention, since the maestro owes considerably to his tenure with All India Radio, initially at Cuttack and then at Bombay. Interestingly, from this point on, even the narrative quality improves perceptibly. One finds a tautness hitherto absent; even the active voice is used in a more restrained manner, and also feels much more appropriate than it did earlier.

It stands to the credit of the author that she handles Chaurasia's knotty personal life with refreshing candour. While stationed in Cuttack, he met and fell in love with a young singer called Angurbala. At around the same time, his father fixed his marriage without even informing him. Unable to either defy his father or forsake his beloved, he ended up marrying twice, the second one (to Angurbala, renamed Anuradha) admittedly being invalid in the eyes of law. Kamala, the first wife, looked after his father in Allahabad, while Anuradha ended up moving with him to Bombay.

This shift marked another epoch in Chaurasia's life. His work with the radio continued unabated, but he also began gaining recognition in other circles. He got frequent concert engagements. Moreover, he even made a name for himself in the film industry as a provider of incidental music. His circle of friends increased; many, like the *santoor* exponent Shiv Kumar Sharma have remained close to this day.

However, professional and financial success spawned in its wake a growing sense of detachment, a feeling that his tutelage was somehow incomplete. He resolved to seek guidance from Annapurna Devi, the reclusive daughter of Baba Allauddin Khan and a musical colossus in her own right. Chaurasia took more than a year to persuade her to accept him as a disciple. He even switched to a left-handed playing style to demonstrate his dedication. But once he succeeded in convincing her, he was made privy to her innermost worlds as very, very few were.

The book attains remarkable heights in documenting Chaurasia's training under Annapurna Devi. Her peculiar timings (lessons from ten at night to one or two in the morning), volatile temperament, exacting requirements from her students, even her unique teaching methods—it recounts in sensitive detail all that he experienced at first hand, and provides unparalleled insights into the personality of that most enigmatic of musicians. It also sheds light on her son Shubho, who somehow couldn't live up to his early promise and was destined to die a tragically unfulfilled artist at the age of fifty. Chaurasia and he were of the same age, and inevitably became close friends and confidantes.

This period also witnessed upheavals in the maestro's personal life. His first wife and her children also moved to Bombay. The potentially catastrophic situation was saved by an almost unbelievable stroke of luck – the two wives warmed up to each other and soon became close friends.

Professionally, he began to flower in earnest. Film offers, foreign tours and domestic concert engagements began flooding in. Even record company executives, initially reluctant to venture into flute albums, began to pursue him. He and Shivkumar Sharma teamed up to compose film music with great success. Ultimately, he set up his own *gurukul* in a Bombay suburb. Gradually, the uncertainty of his early life came to be replaced by a stodgy stability befitting an acclaimed classical musician.

Here onwards, the narrative lapses into hagiography. It does little more than recount the maestro's successful career and family life exclusively from his point of view. One chapter is devoted to his students and how they have fared in the professional circuit. Another discusses for some obscure reason his prominent women admirers and his relations with them – in my opinion, completely superfluous!

In general, I feel where the book really succeeds is in its treatment of the maestro's interchanges with the musical world. Through its portrayal of radio-station politics, Annapurna Devi's warm-hearted eccentricities, record executives' misgivings about classical albums, the venerable flautist Pannalal Ghosh's reluctance to teach and so on, it documents vital chunks of the post-independence history of classical music. When it comes to the man, it does not tell us anything more than what he himself wishes to reveal. (This, of course, contributes to the book's strongly autobiographical flavour.)

Even regarding Chaurasia's musical innovations, the narrative fails to satisfy. For example, it recounts how he derived his technique from the *tantrakari ang*, or the performative idiom associated with stringed instruments. Special reference was made of the *jhala* movement. Now, *jhala* as played on stringed instruments makes extensive use of the *chikari* or drone strings. This is naturally not possible on the flute. Chaurasia's technique actually resembles that employed by *dhrupad* singers, which consists of individual notes produced in very quick succession three or four times.

More crucially, the narrative altogether leaves out how he adapted to the flute the *gat-toda* form, which involves systematic Raga-expansion on the basis of compositions and note-patterns set to rhythm-cycles. This comprises the most significant departure from the *gayaki-ang* or vocal-idiom so far followed by flautists. Consequently, its omission becomes all the more inexplicable.

However, the positive features of the book are so compelling that these lacunae can be ignored to a decent extent. In conclusion, therefore, this book may be recommended to laypersons and scholars alike, with the caveat that the insights it provides into 20th century developments in music, rather than the main narrative about the man himself, are what really make it worthwhile.

Abhik Majumdar, a lawyer by training, is currently conducting research on intelletcual property. He has to his credit several publications in both law and music.

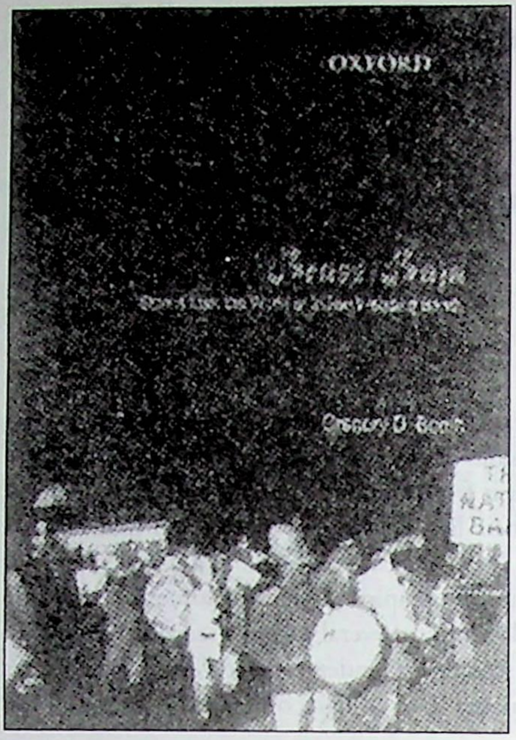
A Sub-culture in the World of Music

Prabhu Ghate

BRASS BAJA: STORIES FROM THE WORLD OF INDIAN WEDDING BANDS
By Gregory Booth
Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2005, pp. 335, Rs. 595.00

As a researcher and participant in an anti-poverty project in eastern UP in which we were trying to come up with suitable livelihood activities for the 40 percent of the population that was totally landless and dependent on agricultural labour, a surprising item would appear in the list of activities that dalit members of the target group expressed an interest in taking up. This was "band-baja". It turned out that many of them already had some experience of participating in processional wedding bands, which were stuck with the label of being a caste-based activity (like most other activities undertaken by the dalits at the time). This led me to note the parallel with jazz, at least superficially. Jazz evolved in its early days partly out of processional music, funeral processions in this case, and like Indian brass bands was syncretic in musical origins. It built upon cotton-picking field chants, gospel, and African rhythmic traditions, just as Indian brass bands drew on western military, regional folk, and increasingly, filmi music. But the most striking similarity was the low status of the musicians, not just along race/caste and economic dimensions, but also initially, musically. Though jazz progressed rapidly in the 1920s and 1930s to become mainstream dancing and listening music (a status it no longer enjoys), the musicians themselves remained on the margins of the festive and celebratory occasions they did so much to create. Even as jazz went on innovating to evolve into a unique art form by the 1940s, with increasingly universal musical appeal, the performers themselves felt more comfortable performing in Europe till the 1950s. It took the transformation in race relations that gathered pace in the 1960s before jazz musicians could completely transcend their social origins to acquire equal musical and celebrity status with their counterparts in the classical and other western music worlds. The musical sub-culture represented by Indian wedding processional bands failed however to undergo the same transformation either musically or socio-economically. This important study, which explores the relationship between musical changes in the band world and broader societal and cultural changes in colonial and postcolonial India (or of "musical changes as metaphor") helps explain why.

The author explains that he has had to sacrifice some degree of ethnographic depth in exchange for geographic breadth. His justification for doing so is that studies whose chronological and geographic objects of study are more narrowly defined (such as Edward Henry's highly regarded *Chant the Names of God: Musical Culture in Bhojpuri-speaking India*, a detailed picture of the depth and breadth of village music culture in a single village near Varanasi in the early 1970s) make it difficult to understand musical change over space and time. His concern is with the specific musical changes in the processional band tradition subsequent to the British arrival in South Asia. He estimates that there are more than about seven thousand private processional brass bands in South Asia, ranging in size from small family groups to large business concerns employing hundreds of full and part-time workers. He documents changes in this musical world through oral histories and interviews gleaned as a participant observer, joining at least 150 wedding processions, and befriending bandsmen in different parts of the country. He describes how a series of changes beginning with bugles, drums, and perhaps fifes, gradually led Indian processional musicians away from pre-colonial instruments and towards brass bands in the late 19th century. The process was led by both Muslims and Hindus of low social



status.

The book will of great interest to an academic audience in anthropology, ethnomusicology and history, and pulls together a great deal of relevant theory, some of which gets a little abstract at times for the general reader. However, it breaks new ground in enhancing our understanding of an important sub-culture in the world of Indian music. In particular the reader is left with a better understanding of why the processional musician remains on the margin in more ways than one. As the author says, "In addition to the low-level social and economic status and reward, playing processional music on Indian streets in not an especially rewarding occupation from a musical or expressive point of view. Brass bandsmen in India are often looked down upon on musical grounds, even by people who hire them, in part because, as I will show, the professional and commercial conditions of their trade do not especially encourage or reward high musical quality. The fact that many bandsmen are rather cavalier about musical quality is added to the list of their sins by their patrons. Band patrons sometimes criticize the popular music repertoire of brass bands; they frequently point to the brass band instrumentation itself as a cause of bandsmen's musical negligibility. Although the demands for brass bands is pervasive across class, cultural and geographic boundaries, the fact that India's wedding musicians perform on the musical instruments and cultural symbols of South Asia's former colonial rulers is routinely held against them. Collectively, these factors locate bandsmen at the most distant reaches of the Indian musical universe. Whether one thinks of classical or popular music as being at the core of Indian music life, almost nobody is farther away from that core than a typical rank-and-file brass bandsman."

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The Man, The Moment and the Movement

Jayanti Seth

CHIMES OF FREEDOM: BOB DYLAN AND THE 1960S
By Mike Marqusee
The New Press, New York, 2003, Rpt. Seagull Books, Calcutta, 2005, pp.378, Rs. 395.00

Bob Dylan is like an arrow that has never returned to an area it has once traversed. As much as his fans have wanted him to revisit the glory days of the 1960s, Dylan has moved on. Yet, it would be difficult to argue that the 1960s were anything but Dylan's decade. The permanent mark he has left on American music comes from his prolific and highly original output during this decade. In *Chimes of Freedom* Mike Marqusee makes strong connections between Dylan's songs and the events of the period to which they are tied.

For those of us who remember the 1960s with a rush of adrenalin, the feature that sets the decade apart was the belief that conventional society needed to change in the name of egalite, of modernity; coupled to this was the somewhat naïve fixation that it could, indeed would change, to accommodate the vision of people who were in their twenties at the time. Bob Dylan spearheaded this movement with his songs of protest.

It is not entirely coincidental that references to arrows and spears creep in quite naturally when discussing Dylan's work at this time. Although this was the music that spoke for pacifism, and was as anti-racist as it was anti-war, Dylan's lyrics contained hidden and overt threats for the "masters of war" – they would be "drownded" in the tide, they would be conquered like Goliath, and the protestors would stand over their graves to make sure that they were dead. This inert fury and violence set Bob Dylan's songs apart from the music of his contemporaries with whom it was closely associated at the time, particularly the work of folk singers such as Joan Baez and the trio Peter, Paul, and Mary.

In this book Marqusee is attempting something very difficult, ie., the deification of a figure who rejected apotheosis by any group or cause. An incident that Marqusee recounts demonstrates this:

> On December 13th, 1963, three weeks after the Kennedy assassination, Dylan arrived at the Hotel Americana in New York City to attend the Emergency Civil Liberties Committee's annual Bill of Rights dinner. The ECLC has been formed in 1951 . . . Each year it presented its Tom Paine Award to a champion of the cause. In 1962, Bertrand Russell had been the recipient. In 1963, the prize went to Bob Dylan.

By the time a very drunk Dylan reached the rostrum, he improvised a speech that seemed calculated to offend everyone present. He spoke of how offensive he found it to find rows of balding men wearing suits sitting in the audience, which covered virtually the entire audience who had gathered at this fund raising event, and then went beyond the pale for even his most radical admirers when he said:

> I got to admit that the man who shot President Kennedy, Lee Oswald, I don't know exactly where, what he thought he was doing, but I got to admit that I too – I saw something of myself in him.

Dylan also shied away from activism and commitment to the causes he espoused in his songs. After the incident recounted above, "He offered to make up any losses the ECLC had incurred because of his behaviour, but never made good on the promise" (p. 100). Marqusee lists other occasions on which Dylan reneged on his promise of financial help, and on commitments of his time. And so the author then shifts to seeing and

For those of us who remember the 1960s with a rush of adrenalin, the feature that sets the decade apart was the belief that conventional society needed to change in the name of egalite, of modernity; coupled to this was the somewhat naïve fixation that it could, indeed would change, to accommodate the vision of people who were in their twenties at the time. Bob Dylan spearheaded this movement with his songs of protest.

assessing Dylan's songs as the poetry of the time. Here he is on much surer ground, as a look at his analysis of *Chimes of Freedom* easily shows:

> It's a transitional work, and as such suggests that the break between the protest era Dylan and the Dylan that followed may be less absolute and abrupt than it seemed at the time. Trapped in a thunder storm, Dylan and a companion take shelter in a doorway of a church. As the church bells ring out in the night, sight and sound collide in a single revelatory moment, a social epiphany in which a vast cast of the dispossessed and oppressed appear and are embraced. Each verse begins with four lines adumbrating a single conceit : the fusing of thunder, lightning, and church bells. It's a self-conscious exercise in the "disarrangement of the senses" recommended by Rimbaud and the French symbolists whom Dylan was reading at the time (p. 103).

In an article published recently in *Brunch* (December 18, 2005) Vir Sanghvi says, "When people tell me that Bob Dylan is the greatest songwriter in American history, I take the line that his songs have aged badly." The question of Dylan's continuing relevance is also behind some of Marqusee's concerns. To make fortuitous connections between the anti-war movement of the 1960s and the half-hearted attempts to register protest against the Gulf War is not entirely convincing. It is valid to seek the relevance of Dylan's songs in the context of the political energy that characterized the youth movement of the 1960s. His music also encapsulates the zeal of youth protesting prevailing norms and mores at any time. If Marqusee fails in achieving a balance in his book it is because he tilts towards writing for sociologists more than for the lovers of Dylan's music.■

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Recovering Women's Lives

Urvashi Butalia

BREAKING BARRIERS: STORIES OF TWELVE WOMEN
By Parvathi Menon
Leftword Books, Delhi, 2004, pp.160, Rs. 95.00

A SPACE OF HER OWN: PERSONAL NARRATIVES OF TWELVE WOMEN
Edited by Leela Gulati and Jashodhara Bagchi
Sage Publications, Delhi, 2005, pp. 274, Rs 340.00

SURVIVAL AND EMANCIPATION: NOTES FROM INDIAN WOMEN'S STRUGGLES
By Brinda Karat. Foreword by Aijaz Ahmad.
Three Essays Collective, Delhi, 2005, pp.304, Rs 275.00

In the prologue to her brilliant book, *Women on the Margins*, historian Natalie Zemon Davis (better known for *The Return of Martin Guerre*) describes an imaginary confrontation with the three women whose lives she seeks to rescue from obscurity. What does she mean, they ask her and each other, by first hunting them out and then placing them next to each other ? 'I've read it,' says one, speaking of the book, 'I'm scandalized. Imagine her enclosing me in a book with such godless women.'

'What do you mean?' asks the second indignantly, protesting that she is not godless at all. In fact, she asserts that God has always been on her lips. 'You can't understand a word I wrote,' she adds.

'I am completely out of place here,' says the third, ' these women were not lovers of nature… this is not my setting.'

Confused, the author begs her protagonists to give her a chance. She's trying to write about gender hierarchies. '*Gender* hierarchies ?' asks one, 'What are gender hierarchies ?' So she tries to explain, elaborating on gender, and hierarchy, and margins, and silence, and adventure. It's the adventure of their lives that she wants to describe. 'It sounds to me, historian Davis, as though *you're* the one who wanted adventure,' says woman No. 3 And Davis agrees, saying, as countless feminist historians have done, 'I wanted to write of your hopes for paradise on earth, for remade worlds, since I have had these hopes too…'. She wanted to write about what it felt like to be in the margins, she says, and they pooh pooh the idea. But she persists, 'Give me another chance,' she says, 'read it again.'

No such debate is likely to take place among the women we meet in two recently published books (*Breaking Barriers: Stories of Twelve Women* by Parvathi Menon and *A Space of Her Own: Personal Narratives of Twelve Women* edited by Leela Gulati and Jashodhara Bagchi), or indeed between them and their authors, although the exercise they engage in is similar in many respects. Parvathi Menon profiles twelve women, all from within the Left movement, constructing short profiles on the basis of interviews, and occasionally on the basis of published material or fragments of papers and speeches. The exercise Leela Gulati and Jashodhara Bagchi are engaged in and whose results they offer here is somewhat different. Their first person accounts were mainly written in a workshop convened with the idea of getting women to reflect on the lives of their mothers and grandmothers, through the prism of their own lives. Four accounts were subsequently added to the original eight, marking this as another dozen. While Zemon's women did not know each other at all, most of the women who figure in these two volumes, are not only known to and familiar with each other, but many cut their political teeth within the same movements, and therefore share a context, if not always a history. And dead or fortunately still with us, I imagine that each one of them would be happy to be in the company of all the others.

Recovering women's lives, as both books demonstrate, and as many others have done so in the past, is an exercise fraught with many dangers. First, there is little or no material, virtually no documentation. None of the 'factual' stuff that mainstream historians set so much store by. Then, there is the women's own reluctance to speak, their devaluation of their lives — despite (for some of them at least) being schooled in the fire of feminism – in favour of their men, or, as in the case of many women in these books, in favour of the movement. When Parvati Menon finally managed to get Ahilya Rangnekar to agree to an interview, for example, the latter suggested that two hours might be enough. Two hours to capture a life spent in struggle ? Menon does not tell us how much time she eventually managed to get, but the essay provides wonderful nuggets such as the story of Ahilya and her comrades hoisting the Congress flag in prison. 'We were able to get green and white saris which we cut and stitched together,' but they couldn't manage an orange one. Until, that is, a woman jailed for prostitution offered her orange sari. Then came the problem of how to hoist the flag: the women needed height. And so they got together to form a pyramid, eight at the base with joined arms, six above them, four in the next tier, and the two smallest at the top. The flag hoisters then scaled this pyramid and managed to get the flag flying atop the prison walls.



'Memory,' Susan Cahill tells us 'contains the map of identity'. Using memory as a prism, the twelve women in the Gulati Bagchi collection trace their lives. As story after story unravels, the shadowy figure of the mother, fighting to educate her daughters against all odds, the young widow, refusing to accept sati, the grandmother, offering unstinting support and love, acquires shape and definition. Initially angry at her daughter for the breakup of her marriage, Nabaneeta Deb Sen's mother later tells her daughter that she thinks of her as her only friend. Vina Mazumdar's grand aunt, Pishima, walks out of her marriage one day, and becomes the fulcrum around which the family revolves, her audacious act only adding to her status. The foremothers of the women's movement emerge from the shadows and become people. Alongside come the unusual men, fathers, brothers, uncles who too played a role in supporting the women we meet, or those who played out their expected roles, sometimes both kinds in the same family. Mary Roy describes a violent father, a habitual wife beater being stopped one day by his son, her brother: 'No, Never again ! Never again are you going to beat your wife or any of your children.'

The insights are not only personal, but each story describes a world, a life, a time which is rescued from the dry dust of conventional history and invested with life and vibrancy. Here is history as people lived it, as they made it: here is a history of women's education, their growing self awareness, their involvement in politics, their commitment to activism, even as they play out their roles in the family and community. Here is also an alternative history of nation making, and nationalism. Both books, in that sense, turn the reader's attention to a different archive – not only the archive of oral history and memory, but the archive of the minituae of women's lives. Where Parvathi Menon's collection slightly loses out to the other, is in the brevity of its accounts, and in the distancing that comes from writing up women's interviews as essays, rather than letting their words speak directly. Not, of course, that the Gulati Bagchi volume is not distanced, for all the essays have a deliberateness and distance that comes from the self-conscious construction of the narrative. But one of the things that marks it is the immediacy and familiarity of the dilemma many women describe: the difficulty of telling a personal story. How much should it reveal ? Who will

be interested ? Why should people be interested in what is, after all, a personal narrative ? And so, while many of the women in the volume believe the dictum that the personal is political, and indeed live it in their lives, they hold back on the personal, falling into the trap that so many of their foremothers have done, and deprive the reader of so much that she could have benefited from.

A third – and very different – book contributes to the archive and history from the margins that the above two books address. Brinda Karat's collection of brief essays and writings entitled *Survival and Emancipation: Notes from Indian Women's Struggles* attempts to map a history of the All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA), and in this it resonates particularly with Parvathi Menon's book which figures many of the women AIDWA claims as its comrades and ancestors (and indeed to which Karat provides a foreword). Karat's basic argument is that she is trying to redress another balance, this time within the women's movement. Whenever histories of this movement have been written, she tells us, they have tended to ignore the strong and multifarious movements and campaigns taking place within Left organizations and parties. It's time, to set this right, for even the sheer size of the membership of such organizations, and the campaigns they take up, show them to be firmly situated inside their context, deeply political and not limited only to party politics.

Karat's scope is wide, and she covers subjects such as food security, the public distribution system, the opposition to the reservation bill, violence against women, the rise of the Right, women and sectarian violence, to name only a few. Her voice speaks for her comrades in AIDWA, and while there is some (expected) hitting out at the bourgeois state, at whose door the writer puts a multitude of ills, one cannot argue with the centrality of the issues she raises. Readers may question the 'one-sidedness' of the narrative here, and it is true that the absence of issues on which Left Party affiliated groups have taken an ambivalent stand (such as sexuality, the banning of bar girls in Mumbai, the issues raised by Khushboo in Tamil Nadu) is noticeable, but in a book that celebrates the achievements of a particular group, in this case AIDWA it is hardly realistic to expect that these subjects will come up for discussion.

Years ago, Vimal Ranadive (profiled in Parvati Menon's book) made a strong attack, in writing, on women's groups that describe themselves as autonomous, or independent of political parties. The mainstream of the struggle, she pointed out, was within the Left, and by raising what were then called 'women's' issues, autonomous groups were weakening the real struggle. The Left's own relative neglect of the women's question, and the persistence of patriarchy within the Party, did not come in for discussion. Karat does not address these issues either, but her critique, while strong, implicitly recognizes the existence of a women's movement (or movements), and argues that there is a strong need for a unified platform to address the many issues that confront women. And indeed, here it reflects the changing relationship between the 'autonomous' groups and the 'party' groups, a relationship of both cooperation and difference, one in which both 'sides' recognize the importance and contribution of the other, one without which there would be no women's movement in this country. Just as the stories of the two dozen individual women, and their 'ancestresses' move out of the shadows into our world, so also, in this book, the thousands of nameless women who form the bottom layer of the social pyramid, emerge from the margins, from obscurity, to make their lives and issues real to the reader. Together, these three books provide an important chronicle of what is perhaps the most vibrant political movement in our country, the women's movement, expanding and enriching its history, helping it hold up a mirror to itself, and increasing its ever-growing archive.■

Urvashi Butalia, co-founder of Kali for Women is now the founder of Zubaan. She is the author of The Other Side of Silence (Penguin/Viking, 1998).

State Ennui vis-a-vis Sex Workers

Jaya S. Tyagi

THE POLITICS OF PROSTITUTION, WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS, DEMOCRATIC STATES AND THE GLOBALIZATION OF SEX COMMERCE
Edited By Joyce Outshoorn
Cambridge University Press, Delhi, 2004, pp.329, price not stated.

The way to assess the patriarchal leanings of a state is to go through its policies towards the so called 'oldest profession in the world'—prostitution. Ideally, state policy should reflect sensitivity to the socio-economic and historical issues related to prostitution, policies should differentiate between prostitution as a socio-cultural institution that treats women as marketable commodities, encourages women and child trafficking, and distinguish it from the individual choices of sex workers who as professionals, deprived of expensive higher education and elitist job opportunities, have no other way of competing in a hierarchical society than 'peddling' the one resource that modern civilization seems to be highlighting and obsessing over— their bodies. Ironically, modernization has not brought in solutions, societal values encouraging the use of women's body as a potential site for exploitation, marketing and pleasure are being constantly pitted against women's struggles for empowerment and ability to choose what they want to do with their bodies.

It would be naïve to think that western democracies, some of which are the self-righteous champions of human rights and equality would have a gender sensitive approach towards prostitution, that instead of taking the high moral ground, they would understand the complexities behind what makes women active participants in the commercialization of sex and allow the exploitative hydra-like growths that thrive around them. Joyce Outshoorn's edited work reveals, graphically and clinically, using a well conceived research model, how western democratic states respond to internal tussles—between their patriarchal leanings, their self conscious morality and the need to make the correct polemical noises about popular representation in the face of women's demands for equality and gender-sensitization towards sex workers. The RNGS—Research Network on Gender Politics and the State—'founded in 1995 at Leiden University, the Netherlands, by a group of political scientists, sociologists and women's studies experts from both sides of the Atlantic', set out to find out 'why some governments and their women's policy agencies are more responsive to women's movement demands than others, and when women's movements are likely to have success or not'. The study is significant as the whole question of women's agency is crucial— for case studies such as these help us in contextualizing the manner in which women influence, or fail to influence policy making.

The book begins with a comprehensive introduction by Outshoorn where she traces paradigm shifts in issues related to prostitution from the time of outright abolitionism to 'rethinking on abolition' since the Vienna Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, 1993 and Beijing Conference's Platform for Action,1995 to the 2000 UN Protocol on Trafficking. The RNGS model, developed by this group of scholars, seeks to analyse policy debates on prostitution initiated by pressure groups and the response of governments to these debates and traces whether there is any change in state policy as a result of the women's pressure groups. State responses are astutely classified into four categories—dual response, when state policy corresponds with feminist goals; cooptation, when the state accepts women's groups into the process but does not give policy satisfaction; pre-emption, when state gives policy satisfaction but without including women's groups into the process; no response, when the state neither gives policy satisfaction nor includes women's groups.

The model is applied to different countries and some not so surprising results come up. In Australia, prostitution has been legalized in most states which have moved away from the 'British model' since the 1970's except for three 'unreformed' states of Western Australia, South Australia, and Tasmania. The legalization of street soliciting came as a result of the demands of civil libertarians— who argued for an end of laws harassing working class men and women. However, rather than the feminist movement, it was different pressure groups which helped in bringing about reform. In Austria, prostitution has always been an important part of Viennese culture, however, in recent times there have been morality debates, and a distinguishing (and disturbing) feature of Austria is that sex work is mostly performed by migrant women— a phenomenon that is common in other western countries too. The book also scans the attitude of the British and Canadian states that treat prostitution as merely a 'nuisance', and particularly in Britain, feminist pressures have ebbed since the 1980's with Thatcherism, and 'prostitution has been a low priority' issue there. The book traces how different states respond in varied ways—Finland which is moving towards a new kind of 'prohibitionism'; meanwhile there is 'elite apathy' in France; debates and policy changes in Israel. In Italy in contrast, the debate focuses on boys rather than women. Moving on to other western democracies like Spain and Sweden, the book shows that they also have had some very different yet contentious debates over the issue whereas the United States is unique in that there is an absence of any debate on prostitution while a plethora of debates on issues like pornography, child abuse, gay rights and such exist. The United States seems to have its moral blinkers on with regard to women and the focus in state policy is on protection of children rather than women.

The 'realistic approach' of Netherlands stands out in contrast, as Netherlands sought to distinguish between voluntary prostitution, regulated as sex work, with forced prostitution— which is illegal since 1999— when it sought to repeal the brothel ban. Netherlands is an outstanding case of a state where the demands of the feminists succeeded in changing the policy of the state, although the growth of sex tourism had a role to play in it too. One reason why the state did formulate a policy on the issue, according to Outshoorn, is because the women's movements groups remained cohesive on this issue. In her article on the Netherlands, she shows how different discourses on the prostitution debate actually reduce the role of women as agents of change. On one hand, the traditional and moral discourse depicts clients as those who lust, brothel keepers and traffickers as unscrupulous men; whereas in the sexual domination discourse, clients are depicted as sexist men seeking to subjugate women through oppression; and lastly, in the sex-as-work discourse, the issue is degendered as prostitutes are seen merely as providers and a client a would-be normal customer. In all the three discourses, the role of women as agents of change is undermined. She also raises some relevant questions—if feminists raise the issue of prostitution, are they underlining the powerlessness of the prostitutes on whose behalf they act?

Analysing the varied data about the efficacy of women's movements Outshoorn concludes that debates in women's movements related to prostitution reemerge in the 'second wave of feminism' but only where movements are cohesive, have they been successful in influencing policy formulation— in Australia, Finland, Israel and the Netherlands. While 'gendering' the debate on prostitution has helped in women gaining access to the state decision making bodies, in some countries like Finland, Israel, the Netherlands and Sweden, in others like Italy, sensitivity has veered towards young boys rather than women and in the US only towards children. Finally, the book makes a strong case for 'state feminism', where successful state policies can be formulated only with 'insider' representation, in issues related to prostitution, there is need not only for women's representation but representatives of the profession to be involved.

The issue of prostitution is especially crucial in this age of globalization, an increase in international tourism and migration has led to the revival of prostitution as a political issue. One can't help but feel that differential levels of development and per capita incomes of different nations has allowed new kinds of trafficking— of women and children of countries of Eastern Europe and Asia and other regions to western countries, a problem which this book merely skirts around, but which needs to be addressed. One of the reasons this problem is not resolved is that as long as there are inequalities, and ideologies that venerate monetary power and domination of one over the other, no amount of liberalism will 'free' modern societies— or the rest of the world. Western 'Democratic' states need to practise what they preach in their own nations, especially with regard to women's representation.■

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Wifehood's Glory

Vasanth Kannabiran

IMMOLATING WOMEN: A GLOBAL HISTORY OF WIDOW-BURNING FROM ANCIENT TIMES TO THE PRESENT
By Jorg Fisch
Permanent Black, Delhi, 2005, pp. 610, Rs. 795.00

From this cliff's brow
For wifehood's glory
With spurning feet I dart
Down into yon fire's heart
To meet him, ne'er to part
Flames reddening o'er me
To nestle to his side,
In Cora's bowers a bride!
O love, though thou hast died,
I'll not forsake thee.

—Euripides, *Supplices*

A couple of decades ago a devoted old couple lived in the South. In the evening of their lives they sat together each evening in their easy chairs on the verandah watching the world go by. A pleasing picture of simple pleasures, togetherness, a sense of belonging, security, an ideal. One day the husband travelled out of town on work and died of a heart attack. Fearing to tell the mother this news the children merely told her that he was unwell and returning the next day. In the morning the sons eft to fetch the body home and found on their return that she had died peacefully as she waited for him sitting in her easy chair. The problem of telling her did not arise. The news never reached her ears. They were cremated together. This awesome incident reminded me of the early debates on what was a true sati. How the true wife would die on hearing the news without having to be walked to the pyre. Not being a historian or an anthropologist but an activist I often shuddered at those debates.

While widow burning has been widely debated inside and outside India its anthropological, religious, social and political contexts have not been fully explored. Largely viewed as a custom that is peculiarly Hindu in its cultural moorings it has long been India's shame and glory. That following into death is a manifestation of a public ritual that is a global phenomenon closely linked to certain beliefs in the hereafter is demonstrated by Fisch's massive scholarly study, *Immolating Women: A Global History of Widow Burning from Ancient Times to the Present.* Jurg Fisch's painstaking study traces the practice of widow burning from ancient times to the present.

Sati has always been a fascinating phenomenon, moving swiftly between black and white, evoking admiration, protest, horror and envy in varying circumstances. Fisch cites two examples: Paolino da San Bartolemeo wrote in 1796 (addressing Pope Pius VI), "If this law… were to be introduced in Europe then so many good husbands would not wander around restlessly and the rule of women in northern countries would come to an end" (p. 356). Marie van Bunsen in 1903 compares the valiant courage and self sacrifice of the widow to the most favoured christian martyrs in its moral aesthetic effect (p.359). Even those who witnessed immolation felt admiration for the widow despite anger, grief and disgust. This, Fisch seems to argue, was no contradiction. The disgust was for the institution while the admiration was for the widow.

The book is divided geographically with India in the second part and the rest of the world in the first. The insights from the first part are picked up and developed in the second. The first part looks at Egypt, Europe, America, Africa, Oceania, China, Japan, Central Asia and South East Asia. India shines in solitary glory in the second part. Fisch looks at the different forms the custom has taken in the course of history. He looks at the conditions and functions of these forms and how widespread they are. Although widow burning or following into death is a historically universal phenomenon it cannot be portrayed in the form of a universal history. Appearing time and again in history the interconnections between its different forms are not easily determined. The origins of the custom cannot be reconstructed. What provides the internal coherence of this study is the fact that the decisive precondition for following into death is a particular form of belief of the hereafter. Whatever the material functions of the custom (political, economic, cultural) it cannot be maintained as a public ritual without a belief in the hereafter. The annihilation of a life is compensated by the belief that the person has been sent to another world. So the loss in this world is a gain in the next, which is a continuation of this world and not its contrasting image. The social order of this world is carried into the next with no intervening day of judgment. This is perhaps why neither Christianity nor Islam which preach a day of judgment and a contrasting hereafter do not uphold this custom. This significant insight alone makes the study worthwhile.

What are the social conditions that give rise to customs such as following into death and what effect do these customs in turn have on society? Since only certain categories of people can be accompanied in death social inequality is another precondition of the custom. Depending on whether the following into death is based on class or on status Fisch points out that it can be defined as an institutional following into death or an individual following into death. While both types strengthen the position of those who have a right to be followed in death the divisions within a society determine the nature of the position. While the institutional following has to do with the political system and the position of the ruler and ruling class the individual form falls within the realm of social conditions particularly the matrix of gender relations. Only rulers and husbands are entitled to the honour.

The revival of sati with Roop Kanwar's death in 1987 illuminates our understanding further. The protest against sati mobilized 3000 people whereas the march in support of sati mobilized 70,000. Widow burning was seen as a unique embodiment of the traditional values of Hinduism to be maintained and nurtured. The prohibition of sati was condemned as a violation of religious freedom and the secular nature of the Indian state was attacked. While in the nineteenth century the opponents of sati could be accused of collaborating with foreign rule, in the twentieth century they were intellectuals corrupted by decadent western ideas, alienated from tradition and far from the feelings and concerns of the common people. The counter argument was based on women's rights, inalienable, derived from the Constitution and any overriding religious custom, rite or practice. Widow burning is not a subject that India has put behind it forever.

The central question is how does one construct the relationship between the respect for cultural individuality and the universal claims of moral norms? Is it merely a matter of perspective? Although the custom has encountered criticism, rejection and resistance its disappearance was linked to the spread of rationalism resting on the argument of equality derived from natural law and human rights. Regardless of multicultural declarations any country tolerating this custom would lose its standing in the international community. The suppression of such customs has become an unspoken but compelling standard of civilization. A universal claim based on human rights which is above all religions and becomes a standard to measure them. For this relief we give thanks.

The success with which this custom was abolished, the upholding and history of this success can be seen as reflecting both the physical and intellectual power of Europe.

Fisch's detached, impersonal, scholarly discussion of incident after incident, his painstaking tracing of causes and factors, his refusal to draw apparently obvious conclusions, the measured ponderous progression of this text from ancient times to the present, and his rare collection of illustrations makes the book valuable reading. His judiciously crafted conclusions reassure us of the possibility of a sane society.■

Vasanth Kannabiran is a feminist writer.

Inhabiting Two Worlds

Ratna Kapur

TRANSNATIONAL MIGRATION AND THE POLITICS OF IDENTITY: WOMEN AND MIGRATION IN ASIA SERIES, VOLUME I
Edited by Meenakshi Thapan
Sage, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 324, Rs. 620.00

Migrants officially sent home more than US$167 billion dollars to their families in developing countries this year, a figure more than twice the level of international aid, according to the findings of the World Bank's annual Global Economic Prospects report for 2006, titled *The Economic Implications of Remittances and Migration*. Thus, the critical role that is being played by the migrant subject, in particular, the transnational migrant subject in the contemporary world, makes Meenakshi Thapan's first volume in the Women and Migration in Asia Series, very timely. Indeed, the issue of migration is fast becoming the central social justice issue of our times, and to have a volume that is particularly focused on addressing the gender aspects of migration is critical to any legal and policy formulation that responds to these global flows.

The series emerged from a major international conference on Women and Migration in Asia organized by the Developing Countries Research Centre, University of Delhi, 2003. The conference has spawned a series of five volumes that are due over the course of the next couple of years. Thapan's volume on transnational migration is the first in the series. The overall concern of the series is to centre the study of gender and to fill a major gap in existing literature. Women make up 44.4 percent of total number of migrants from South Asia. Yet women have either been excluded from migration analyses or, when included, have been perceived either as non-migrants waiting for their spouses to return or as passive dependants of male migrants.

Perhaps the most significant overall contribution of this volume is towards complicating notions of agency when it comes to women's experience of migration. The literature addressing women's movement today has primarily been focused on the context of trafficking, especially 'sex trafficking' and invariably reproduces images of women from the Asian context as being thoroughly victimized, infantile, and lacking the ability to choose to move. A series dedicated to focusing on women's migration, removes women's movements from a law and order, criminal justice and morally conservative framework, and reframes it within the context of movement, choice and agency. While the essays attest to the fact that agency is neither a neat nor tidy construction, they significantly challenge the stereotyped, patronizing, and utterly disrespectful neo-imperial representations of women in Asia as in need of constant rescue and rehabilitation, usually by the 'Great White Saviour' or 'Imperial Feminist' (located both 'here' and 'there').

The volume focuses on women's immigration, and problematizes notions of identity and the heterogeneity of their experiences. It addresses how women construct their identities in countries of destination, which are alien and unfamiliar, the problems she faces and strategies she formulates in making her life in such new spaces more agreeable. At the same time, she remains connected with her country of origin, through family ties, cultural practices, and even nationalist narratives. The volume brings out the tension that she experiences inhabiting two worlds simultaneously and the fluid nature of her identity as well as how it is regulated and structured by state and social institutions.

In the Introductory chapter, 'Making Incomplete: Identity, Women and the State', Meenakshi Thapan, discusses how disasporic `consciousness' is constructed through both physical traversals and psychological dilemmas that are integrally linked to women's experience of migration. Diaspora is defined broadly, to include transnational crossings and `transnationality' and the impact of transnational flows on understandings of gender, culture, space and political location (p. 25). The migration experience is complex, fluid and multiple, and is deeply implicated in the way it is structured by the state. This includes the restraints to migration as well as the resistance to the constraints that women may experience. The framework directly challenges constructions of Asian women's subjectivity as weak, passive and incapable of decision-making and defined exclusively in terms of their victimization.

The complex framework within which female migration is addressed includes examining issues of subjectivity, identity and location. One key aspect of the volume is to focus on the complex subjectivity of the migrant subject, and foreground the different locations and contexts from which she speaks. She is not a cardboard cut-out, who is passive and acted upon. There are a host of considerations that go into influencing her movement as well as her survival in the host country. Identity is a critical experience of the female migrant. As Thapan states, the migrant's identity is rendered fluid in the process of movement and relocation. "The representation of identity therefore is an ongoing process, since immigrant identities are continually transformed by their journey; their subjectivity recomposed in 'different practices and sites of experience'" (p. 29). The migration experience is not a one way process. There is an active effort on the part of the female migrant woman to maintain links with the homeland. It is a personal as well as strategic move to resist the representations of their community as inferior through demeaning definitions of their race and class in the host country.

Part of the refashioning of identity includes maintaining ties with the homeland, which is not simply an act of nostalgia but also a political act of making their migrant act meaningful and to deal with the dislocation and disorientation they may experience in the host country. This act of restaging one's identity takes the form of films, songs and even decorating one's home in ways that closely approximate the one's left behind. In writing about the experience of Bhumihar (upper caste) women in Maruitius and in India , Sinha-Kerkhoff's contribution to the volume, 'From India to an Indian Diaspora to a Maritian Diaspora: Back-Linking as a Means for Women to Feel Good Locally', illustrates how the linkages to the past are established. These take on a gender form, where young girls are socialized to fit into narrow Indian identities rather than adopt a transnational or bicultural identity. They are the repositories of 'authentic' Indian identity, who as women will return to the homeland through marriage. Not only does this result in a distance from Maruitian society, it also produces a distance from the country of their birth, as they inhabit an imagined homeland. The homeland is quite different from their imagined one, and they experience a further sense of dislocation upon their return. Their identities are constantly renegotiated in the process of this movement between the host country and the homeland, in an effort to feel comfortable in their skins wherever they may be located.

Nilufar Ahmed in 'Women in Between: The Case of Bangladeshi Women Living in London', examines how the Bangladeshi immigrant woman in London goes through similar transitions and renegotiations. She is neither British nor Bangladeshi, for neither completely offers her security. She goes through a process of constantly redefining her role and reevaluating her self. While women are afforded the opportunity to work and be educated, there is also a discomfort with the functioning in male spheres that gives a sense of compromising on their cultural identities. They search for a sense of comfort through the reenactment of their homeland, for example, by fulfilling their traditional roles as mothers, and inculcating cultural and traditional values in their children. They struggle to mimic the tradition or authentic role of grandmother or mother and in many cases are unable to do so. Nor can they relocate back to Bangladesh which also becomes alien to them, as it has altered and is no longer familiar. The result is that she lives in a permanent flux, living 'somewhere in between' both spaces, yet belonging entirely to neither. At the same time, there remains a core element to the identity of the Bangladeshi migrant, which is her Muslim identity, upon which all other aspects of her identity are contested and negotiated.

Another aspect of the female migration experience explored in this volume is that of the intergenerational experience, where there is a

transmission and reworking of identity through generations. Aparna Rayaprol's essay, 'Being American, Learning to be Indian: Gender and Generation in the Context of Transnational Migration', contrasts the experience of the first generation immigrant women in the Indian diaspora in North America with the experiences of the second generation. Mothers, fearing the assimilation of their children into 'North American culture', deliberately inculcate traditional values into them. And the focus of these efforts remains primarily on the girl children. Young girls are urged to learn Indian classical dance, while the boys do not experience similar pressure. Indeed, young men from the community prefer to minimize their Indian identity, attempt to be mimic Americans, by drinking beer and dating white women.

There is at the same time resistance from the younger generation who prefer to live hyphenated identities – that is as Indo-Americans – rather than take on the "pure" Indian identity of their parents. They also resist certain aspects of culture and identity including arranged marriages or even heterosexuality. These include the spawning of literature on South Asian gay and lesbian identities, forging a major challenge to the bounded assumptions of earlier generations about 'Indian sexuality'. Yet these gestures of resistance are not always progressive, for this generation also has to contend with the version of Indian identity that is effectively and persuasively propagated by the *Vishwa Hindu Parishad*, the mastiff of the *Hindutva* propaganda machine. This second generation is thus involved in a complex negotiation on identity, living and expressing it in ways that are less restrictive or confining.

The role of 'patriarchy' is also explored in this volume; though not defined, it appears to be confined to an understanding of women's traditional roles in the home. Santi Rozario, in her essay 'Singular Predicaments: Unmarried Female Migrants and the Changing Bangladeshi Family', examines how Bangladeshi cultural and patriarchal norms are experienced by immigrant women in Australia, contrasting the position of a married woman with that of a single woman. Through two case studies, the essay examines how the migration of single women abroad are perceived and treated within the immigrant community as well as in their home country upon their return. While they may migrate with the primary purpose of providing financial support to their families, the overriding concern of the family remain their marital status. Her singleness is constructed as an 'anomaly' and 'unnatural'. They are the constant source of gossip and rumour regarding their sexual behaviour. In contrast, married women experience greater confidence and independence when moving with their husbands and also have considerable space for negotiation with their husbands. This behaviour does not necessarily mean that they are challenging male authority, but rather bargaining with it.

With regard to women who move for work, the book examines how the out-migration process of Asian woman is facilitated and perpetuated by the state. An overriding concern is to improve a country's economic situation in the hope of receiving substantial remittances. These women are channelled primarily into 'feminine' jobs, such as the sex industry or domestic work, and are subordinated by racist and gender assumptions on the part of employers who view Asian women as passive and docile and less likely to offer resistance. At the same time, these racialized assumptions are also accompanied with envy and desire for the 'Other'. Experiences with sexual discrimination and racial oppression are partly mediated by the public and private sphere of their work. It also influences the cultural construction of their identities. Space therefore is critical in giving meaning to women's racial, sexual and gendered experiences of migration.

Parin Dossa in 'Breaking the Silence: Identity Politics and Social Suffering' examines how state and citizenship structure women's experience of gender and race. Through the story of Fatima a political refugee to Canada, who ends up as a full time care-giver following a car accident in which her daughter suffered a brain injury, she examines how the structural location of the immigrant who is disabled or a care-giver, affects her ability to function, in particular, restricting her participation in political life and limiting her ability to act as a citizen. She examines how the intersection of race, gender and disability, marginalize subjects and pushes them into a private sphere that renders them virtually invisible.

Irene Gedalof's paper, 'Women, Home and Belonging in UK Immigration Policy', looks at how integration can be achieved with diversity. This move requires that the native has a sense of her own identity and belonging before any negotiation of difference or surrendering difference can take place. At the moment difference is understood as threatening. In the reproductive sphere, the family of immigrants is taken to be a threat to 'border integrity' in relation to the nation, as it provides an entry point for difference. Gedalof explores the position of immigrant women against the gendered notion of home, belonging and identity. Her experiences of linguistic isolation, exposure to primitive cultural practices, and gender subordination in her community, are appropriated by 'gender-aware and 'imperial-feminist' discourses which relocate the immigrant woman in a space of progressive British identity that is held out as the standard norm.

The notion of citizenship is also deeply implicated in discourses of secularism and the right to religious expression. In 'Gender, Race and Racism: The Ban of the Islamic Headscarf in France', Christine Delphy examines how the French conception of citizenship pursues a model of secularism that confines religion strictly to the private sphere. While Islam regulates both the private and public life of the Muslim, it is seen to be at odds with the French conception. The

Muslim is cast in opposition to modernity. Yet the objection to public religious expression is also seen to be counter to the discourse of multiculturalism. This debate has been played out over the issue of the wearing of headscarves by young Muslim women in public schools in France. While one position regards the headscarf as a symbol of oppression by men in the community, or that it is ugly and hides women's femininity, another casts the wearing of the headscarf as choice and a challenge to the assimilative practices of the liberal democratic state. Delphy argues that the ban operates as an opposition to race as an element in a citizen's national identity. Yet in practice, the children of immigrants from North Africa, who are French citizens are never perceived as French. Assimilation can never be a reality for the African.

The public and vocal objections to the veil as a symbol of patriarchal subordination are contrasted by Delphy with how the oppression of women in French society, rape and racial discrimination are underplayed. Young African women have veiled as a deeply political act in the name of women's rights. They continue to wear their veils as acts of rebellion, transforming a negative stereotype into a positive trait. It is this sign of resistance to racism that the French government together with feminists seek to repress, while ignoring the cause of racism, or dealing with racial discrimination.

While France's equality ideal is based on assimilation and thus the stripping the 'Other' of difference, it is not clear that the politics of multiculturalism operates in a more liberating way for women in immigrant communities. Sunera Thobani examines how multiculturalism in Canada has operated to construct communities in discrete racial, ethnic or cultural groups in her essay, 'Cultured Girls: Race, Multiculturalism and the Canadian State'. While it serves as the only official mechanism by which to express heterogeneity and at the same time being accepted into nationhood, it is woefully inadequate. The discriminatory and violent practices of a community remain unexamined under the guise of multiculturalism, which depoliticizes the experience and space of culture and difference within the minority community.

In the final essay in the collection, Maitrayee Chaudhuri, argues that cultural identities are not rooted in territory, but that the experience of the self and society is a dialectical one. The identity of the Bangladeshis in the slums of Delhi, is fluid to the extent that these migrant communities do not necessarily consider their ethnic identity relevant. Yet these identities do come to the fore when issues such as deportation arise. She also examines the way in which the stable identity formations amongst Bengali migrants, grounded in culture and tradition, stand in contrast to the more modern formations of identity amongst middle-class Bengalis and Indians that have been constituted in and through more modern discourse of individualism, and fragmented cultural landscapes. She also argues that the broader processes of migration and the ways in which the nation-state defines citizenship, who belongs and who doesn't, are deeply implicated in women's lives. The gendered construction of citizen-subjects involves women's roles in the family, their sexual behaviour and their roles as mothers of the nation.

This first volume of the series is exceptional in terms of research quality as well as depth of analysis. It is an extremely valuable and significant contribution not only to migration studies, but also to postcolonial feminism and understandings about women's agency. It reveals the complex layering and intersections of culture, race, religion as well as gender when it comes to women's experience of migration. Perhaps the one limitation of the volume is the absence of an analysis of the role of law in regulation female migration and how it contributes to the construction of identities, the experiences of exploitation and vulnerability, the production of clandestine migrant mobility regimes, and to the formation of sexual and racial subjectivities. As an authoritative discourse and one that is critical in drawing the various borders discussed in this collection, it is hoped that critical legal analysis will find a place in some of the subsequent volumes. Nevertheless, this book is timely and is touching upon what are clearly the most important social justice and feminist issues of this decade.■

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Endearingly Timeless

Susan Visvanathan

HERSELF:GENDER AND EARLY WRITINGS OF MALAYALEE WOMEN
Translated from the Malayalam and edited by J.Devika
Stree, Kolkata, 2005, pp. 181, Rs. 450.00

This book has a fresh and endearing sense of timelessness, although the essays translated here are of women writing in their native tongue in the 1930s. While U.R Ananthamurthy was called in by the Kerala government to help revive government schools and the teaching of Malayalam, the natives of the 21st century had concluded that the learning of English was what would get them jobs abroad, and that this was integral to the survival of the Malayali. It is interesting that the problems of bilingualism are not in the forefront in this collection, and these Malayali writers are comfortable with their erudition as editors of magazines, or as activists or as housewives.

Thanks to Devika's detailed notes we get to hear the voices of the others in the fray, the men and women who are part of the debate. These are very scholarly and reader friendly texts, which accompany the essays like loyal shadows. It is extremely curious that the concerns these women had are so similar to the ones we have now.

Each essay deals with questions of conjugal duties, the preoccupation with cooking and nurturing children, the power of women, the right to choose between public life and domesticity, the right to fight for the support necessary for conjoining these two worlds, the debate on ornamentation and patriarchal appellation of male names, and the concern with economic and political contributions to society. There are sociologists who feel there was no feminism in India before the facility of receiving feminist books from the West (Professor Leela Dube has some strong resistance to that viewpoint!) and Devika's very strenuous research work, with an army of academic friends both male and female, seems to support Mrs Dube's poition.

I suppose we must enquire about the class and caste situation of these women (there are Ezhavas, Antarjanam Brahmins, Nairs, Syrian Christians and Muslims, but in Kerala, thanks to Narayana Guru, everyone believes themselves to be a "dominant caste"!). It is interesting that these ladies, with supportive families, were very conversant about what was happening in the world outside, and the debates within India itself. This has perhaps to do with Kerala's characteristic social morphology where there is no opposition between town and country.

There is one outstanding piece of writing, which the editor too thinks might be a" plant"! It's called 'My Life and My Home-Making'. Nair historians might see it as emblematic of that moment which G.Arunima describes as "Here Comes Papa" (after Raja Ravi Varma of course!) and the litigations of the 1930s. As an essay, it perfects the moment when truth and fiction are analogous, and is authored by one hitherto unknown Manntraveetil Laksmy Amma. The hedonism of reading that essay is countered by the rapier sharp language of Anna Chandy in an essay called 'On Women's Liberation', and both pieces while having different vantage points, have their place in feminism.■

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Exploring Varied Terrains

Niharika Gupta

JUST BETWEEN US: WOMEN SPEAK ABOUT THEIR WRITING
Edited by Ammu Joseph, Vasanth Kannabiran, Ritu Menon, Gouri Salvi and Volga
Women Unlimited with Asmita and Women's World (India), New Delhi, 2004, pp. 367, Rs. 350.00

Given the range it represents in terms of location, generation, community and caste, this volume of eighteen interviews seeking to explore issues related to gender and censorship often invites the reader to lose herself in individual accounts that open up unfamiliar areas of experience, of history and of political struggle. There is also the absorption of watching how memories of childhood surroundings and literary apprenticeship are gathered into coherence, the delight of incidental detail (Jupaka Subhadra describing the luxury of time at university, where friends she visited would say, "'Take a bath, and study.' I just loved that") and of words on the business of words (Rajani Parulekar, "Whatever narrative thread I've wanted to unravel, I've always done through my long poems.... I've never felt the need to embroider it further into a short story"). What is really valuable, however, is the way the book repays rereading, and one sees how the separate interviews speak to each other, how similar words are inflected differently and how the ideas of selfhood or history that we sense being shadowed by the words of one writer begin to assume body through the remarks of another. Those interviewing the writers are for the most part themselves involved in writing, teaching or activism, and in most if not all cases speak the writer's own language.

In setting out the vision behind having a series of workshops on gender-based censorship, the Introduction outlines the way official histories and institutional structures have ignored women, referring towards the close to the impact of globalization on the publishing world and on education. Though it is punctuated throughout by the words of women writers, it does not seek to encompass the voices of the women within the volume, perhaps deliberately leaving them to bring texture to its argument. Given the number of areas it moves through, some threads might have been teased out more carefully, such as women's relation to language and to the private domain, but it does plot out areas for investigation besides providing useful historical details. Institutions remain a concern throughout the interviews. Though there are many among these writers who have received praise from their first publications as students, accounts of the publishing process give the reader an idea of how many publishing houses are still willing to encourage first-time authors (in Hindi, Marathi and Gujarati), besides the fact that several writers find equally instructive the history of material being rejected and later, with the passage of time, finding a new incarnation.

Given the freewheeling character of the questions, it is interesting to see how the sense of a literary milieu comes through, and to compare the different languages for the concerns with which a writer and her readers like to engage. Some conversations fill out a stronger sense of literary history for a reader unfamiliar with it: the conversation with Jeelani Bano, in assessing the uniqueness of her style refers to the Progressives, the Modern and other great women writers, while Neelesh Raghuvamshi's discussion of her mentors conveys a sense of the exchange between different generations in the Hindi literary world. One may not come away with as vivid an impression of past and present writers in Kerala, despite four Malayalam writers being interviewed, for in these conversations much room is occupied by activism *outside* writing, at the same time that public discussion of politics impinges more insistently on literature. Some of the questions explore the writers' involvement in the women's movement and environmental campaigns, while others worry at textual matters around current debates in Kerala on the politics of language and the constraints of traditional form. Jupaka Subhadra comes up with remarkable insights into the relations between language and lived experience in her reference to how the labouring women of Telengana refused to accept the sheer metaphoricity of struggle evoked in a song of protest about turning the tears of the moon into knives.

An interesting interplay of responses is evoked by the label "woman writer". Bani Basu declares that creative people are androgynous, Shashi Deshpande speaks of interpreting themes from a woman's perspective but then suggests that with time one moves towards an identity not limited by gender. Jeelani Bano says simply that she writes from a woman's perception, before she turns her energies to discussing issues concerning women today. Githa Hiranyan's response on being "decided by particular contexts" is perhaps closest to felt experience, saying that it is when treated as a mere female body by a man that she becomes a feminist, but that she may also write as a human about the suffering of both genders.

It is perhaps not surprising that as writers who have achieved voice themselves, almost all assert that genuine writers will not let themselves be silenced whatever implicit and overt constraints they face. Yet the strongest of these assertions is qualified by the admission that often something could have been said by even those "who have not been able to create opportunities for themselves". When Maitreyi Pushpa speaks of areas that have no articulation but tears—the pain of riot or rape—she seems really to be arguing for writing as cathartic. She is also perhaps the only one to chart her own growth in terms of recognizing and freeing herself from systems of censorship. What does recur is the sense, sometimes in interview after interview, of not being discussed seriously by the literary establishment. Effacement then becomes strategy, and a writer like Vaidehi preferred to "hibernate" until she found her footing as a writer.

The writers concentrate on different aspects of their work—some on their growth as writers, others on their attempt to verbalize their fascination with the senses or the arts, some like Manisha Joshi on their imagery. This can lead to unevenness—one wishes the interview with Imtiaz Dharkar contained more reflections on her writing. Those who speak of the writing process often refer to working quietly in the small hours after family duties are done. It is interesting to contrast Vaidehi's sense of becoming herself only as she sat at her desk, a refuge from the joint family, with the more immediate sense of threat in Maitreyi Pushpa's reference to the outer world confronting one as soon as one leaves one's room. Then there is the writer who is always, so to speak, in the laboratory, B.M Zuhara and others referring to doing "quiet investigation" in railway compartments and social gatherings on different kinds of dialect and slang.

Some writers mention both parents being scholars, others recall literary friends of their fathers, on working on family newspapers or "indulging in baith-bazi" with siblings, while there are those like Neelesh Raghuvamshi, whose mother was illiterate but listened to her "rebellious thoughts" of wanting a job, and who managed to persuade her father that it was important that "for the first time in this family, somebody has said she will not marry and wants to work." One notices how two different kinds of generational change display amusing resemblances. Gauri Deshpande acknowledges both her intellectual inheritance and the fact that her father's support of her mother, Iravati Karve, made him "an extraordinary man for his generation." At the same time, she marks her sense of distance from her mother, "a traditionalist, not a feminist", and laughs over Karve's being "almost Victorian" when it came to discussing matters of sexuality with her daughters. And Vaidehi and Jupaka Subhadra, both of whom were the first women in their families to go to university, also laugh over the way they managed to keep their word to their families to acquire an education without losing their reputation.

As the narrative of formative experience is coaxed out, there shimmers forth against it our awareness of very different kinds of environment. Shashi Deshpande speaks of being both embarrassed by and relishing the sense of being considered different, as the daughter of a charismatic teacher with idiosyncratic views, while Neelesh Raghuvamshi describes how despite living in a locality where girls never came out of their homes, her father "quietly gave us courage to work in the dhaba." Caught up in the immediate pleasures of biography, one can find oneself comparing individuals instead of processes, trying to trace a plot directed towards equal, supportive relationships. If

Shashi Deshpande conveys how it was an exacting kind of privilege to have a father who sacrificed his security and his family's to a matter of principle, Varsha Adalja describes how despite their need to buy an apartment, her husband told her not to take up an office job which would leave her no time to write, "You will write better in these times of struggle." Of course, the actual material demands more nuanced reading of the internal contradictions within families, where daughters-in-law may be treated more fairly than daughters, where education is a matter both of status and of discomfort.

The matter of self-censorship also demands careful sifting, given that it tends to be denied by most writers, even if they concede it works unconsciously and, barring Sara Joseph, tend to justify rather than open up for exploration their treatment of the theme of sexuality. Here Rajani Parulekar is unusual in describing an actual case of censorship (a poem about physical relationships which she is determined to have published despite the criticism of a colleague), even as she admits to not being bold enough to "dissect" herself through prose.

As most writers spend some time describing the male presences in their lives, one can come away with the inaccurate impression that fathers matter more than mothers. It is no surprise that fathers are more usually the public figures and those to whom decisions are referred, but what is moving is the way women are shown amidst other women – grandmothers through whose stories one comes to know *their* grandmothers, mothers with domestic helpers "laughing and amusing people around" as they worked, sisters who painted, wrote or taught one astronomy, sisters-in-law who supported one's writing. Then there are the difficult, if ultimately affirmative, stories of difficult marriages, husbands whose personal companionship only found space within claustrophobic joint families and husbands whose private conduct violates their public espousal of egalitarianism.

Childhood emotions and landscapes are often evoked with a particular vividness of apprehension, but one observes how the incoherence of later years – the sense of being disregarded and lonely within the joint family, of being disregarded and confused within the Left Movement – only comes into contact with a sense of self through the act of writing. That vantage-point that allows one to say anything at all is revealed as something not given but precariously sustained by translating experience, one's own and that of others, into words. For one of the younger writers, Manisha Joshi, selfhood subsists on the banality, "bashed about, resounding, shining", of the everyday. But for writers looking back on a career sometimes contexts refer to moments of depression – apprehension that they would not be allowed to write, the desire for greater discussion of their works, the sense that they might have written differently had they been able to travel.

Reference to (what is translated as) depression might recall the outraged responses in *The Guardian* to the suggestion in the Introduction to *New Writing 13* (March 2005) that "too many women writers have been injected with a special drug that keeps them dulled, good, saying the right thing, aping the right shape, and melancholy at doing it, depressed as hell." Whatever the context of this impression, writers like Shahjahana speak of trying to communicate the lives of other women , past and present, through their stories – as one puts it, "writing their autobiography".

Among the most compelling passages are those where writers communicate their sense of history as a great mass of material that waits to be explored, played with and shaped into new forms through writing. This is sometimes history in the landscape around, Alka Saraogi roaming 'Kali Katha' on foot, or Warangal "turned inside out" by Jupaka Subhadra. Or it is immediate history, the picture of a child victim of bombing, which makes the unvisited landscape of Vietnam, its colours of soil and sky become part of an obsession for Varsha Adalja.

Jupaka Subhadra and Neelesh Raghuwamshi have contrasting views on the category of dalit literature. The first feels that nothing in the available literature answered her own experience as a woman and a dalit. She wants not only to write her own stories but to explore dalits in literary history. While Neelesh Raghuwamshi believes that such categories work to constrict the writerly possibility of entering any area of experience one chooses, she demonstrates a similar concern to extend the space afforded by literature, when she says that something should be done for those whose condition is always being written about in works they themselves do not get to read. It is in the way that they push the possibilities of getting a sense of different literary histories by bringing multiple voices into conversation that collections of conversations such as these retain their importance and their continuing interest.■

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Communication: "Revive Nalanda"

The concept of revitalizing Nalanda as a centre of learning excellence seems timely as India is poised to become a leading player in the world. The educational scene hovers between the middling and disgraceful and badly needs a beacon light to prove that excellence is not foreign to the Indian milieu. To inspire needs a powerful symbol and regeneration of a former scene of internationally recognized excellence makes Nalanda the perfect choice for several reasons.

(1) Nalanda's excellence is a matter of historical record and its recall does not involve escape to some mythical realm or imaginary landscape.
(2) Nalanda's inspiration derives from Gautams the Buddha's openminded quest for human excellence, irrespective of the seeker's birth, sex or social standing.
(3) Nalanda represents the essential Indian spirit of fearless enquiry
(4) Nalanda stands for a universalist outlook that transcends provincialism.
(5) Nalanda's intellectual associations are free of extreme religious positions.
(6) Nalanda's freedom from fundamentalist concerns give it a secular democratic character in keeping with the constitution.
(7) Nalanda's revitalisation will hasten the return of the glories of Magadh to Bihar.
(8) Nalanda's principles have been subliminally incorporated in the national logo (which displays only three of the four lions on the Ashokan pillar.) Nalanda's restoration will symbolize the harnessing of the dormant fourth lion to educational reconstruction.

All the great educational institutions have been inspired by dedication to what their founders perceived as essential (as opposed to doctrinal) values. William of Wykeham's medieval belief that "manners maketh man" were honed by Dr Arnold in the nineteenth century. Translated into modern incarnations like Mayo and the Doon School the excellence of those medieval standards remain but has become essentially Indian. Gandhiji's Nai Talim, Rabindranath Tagore's Shantinketan and Krishnamurthi's Rishi Valley on the other hand, though valuable experiments have not caught on to suggest that inspiration alone is not enough. There has to be a viable system that outlives the passing of the founder. Public acclaim is an accurate barometre of institutional success. The pursuit of educational excellence is the top priority of most ordinary citizens who value above all what is good for their children.

To restore Nalanda will require imagination and humility more than funds. A small beginning where the students and staff contribute in the physical reconstruction of the campus will raise more public sympathy than the fanfare that goes with cutting the ribbon of a turnkey project by a superannuated sinecurist. (Chandigarh and the UNO are examples of what to avoid!) The two most critical factors will be the quality of staff chosen and the architectural treatment of the environment. Both will have to inspire.

Local involvement is a must and intellectual enquiry should not be to the exclusion of manual involvement in development projects.

The place of politics and religion should follow the military practice of being seen but not heard in public.

Excellence and the hand of government are mutually exclusive terms and the stake of the latter ideally should not be more than 33%. Administrators should be chosen on merit and preferably be young and dynamic with vision.

Pragmatism should partner idealism and the medium of instruction should be chosen on the basis of linguistic science not sentiment.

The most important thing is to cast the seed and that you have done. All good wishes for your enlightened endeavour. Seasons Greetings.

Bill Aitken, New Delhi.

An Ethnographic Work

T.B. Subba

THE AGHRIA: A PEASANT CASTE ON A TRIBAL FRONTIER
By Uwe Skoda
Manohar Books, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 607, Rs.1195.00

This book is based on a PhD thesis recently awarded by the University of Berlin. The author lived in an Oriya village called Mundaloi for 18 months during 2000-02 to collect data for his thesis. Until I read this book I had a kind of belief that PhD theses do not make good books even if they are substantially revised. The smell of a thesis is not the best thing one expects in a book one pays for oneself unlike a thesis to read which one is paid for. This book has forced me to rethink, for it has an uncanny way of holding you on and forcing you to look for details, which is the most important strength of this book. The language is simple and clear, although the issues the author tries to raise are often very complex. Considering that the author is not a native Oriya or an Aghria, the depth of his understanding of the Aghria caste system, dialect, mythology, kinship, life cycle, etc., is rather impressive.

There are eight chapters in this book and more than 100 pages of appendices, which contain extremely rich data on the Aghrias. The first chapter deals with the background, concepts and context of the book; the second is on Aghria mythology; the third on inter-group relations; the fourth on village kings; the fifth on kinship; the sixth on life cycle; the seventh on blending of cycles; and the eighth is conclusion. Let me discuss each chapter in a little more detail.

I think the first chapter of the book is also the weakest, as it reveals rather too much about the author's methodology. It shows that the author focussed on the convergence of tribal and caste societies, and not their divergence, tension and conflict. His study is on a socially and economically dominant caste owning about 50 percent of the better quality village land, but having only 11 households in a village of 139 households. Numerically the various Scheduled Tribes are dominant but socially and economically in a position subordinate to the Aghrias. He claims to have followed Malinowski's "participant observation" but stayed in one of the most prominent landlord's family. And he is happy to note that he had, due to this reason, "easy access to the village". He is of course aware of "not being told anything critical" (p. 48) but is almost proud to declare that he stayed in "a kind of village palace" with plenty of food and material comfort. Short of these limitations the chapter is very well written, and very well researched in terms of published literature.

The author explores in the second chapter the ways in which the Aghrias locate themselves in the society and the ways they conceptualize their origin and status as well as links with religious and political centres in India like Agra near Delhi and Puri in coastal Orissa. Socially, they locate themselves between Brahmans on the one hand and 'Untouchables' on the other, as they are, as Kshatriyas, linked mythologically with both the Brahmans and 'Untouchables' on the two extremes of the social spectrum, but not with the tribes who constitute their frontier. The biggest strength of this chapter is the methodology followed to reconstruct the Aghria myths. He not only looks into the myths as narrated by Disandhri, the professional narrators who wear the sacred thread and who are ritually superior to the Aghrias, but also considers the myths as received from other sources including written sources. He has considered the myths in all its variations before he subjects them to his interpretation, which, although based on a binary framework of high-low, rich-poor, etc., is very powerful and can easily influence a reader who is not familiar with the limitations of a western binary model of the Levi-Straussian kind.

Chapter 3 on inter-group relations is discussed in the caste framework. Hence the issues of food, marriage, seating arrangements, etc. are naturally looked into. The author goes into minute details of inter-group relations. More interesting than such social aspects of inter-group relations are his details about the ritualistic aspects of such relations and how they are informed by principles of caste hierarchy. The chapter shows that caste hierarchy is present in whatever they do and it does not exclude the numerically dominant tribal groups in the village. The ritual-based relations are also examined from the point of view of Mckim Marriott's 'transactional theory'.

The next chapter deals with Aghrias as village kings or Gauntias. It is an interesting account of the relationship that exists in the village he studies between the idea of kingship and ownership of the village land. It also provides the interesting story of the rise and fall of the village kings. It shows that although they have lost a lot in terms of their economic, political and ritual roles they are still very wealthy village landlords. Although revenue collection by them is abolished, their dominance is re-established through the PCOs they have established in the village. The villagers go to the PCOs to make phone calls but they are sometimes not charged if they belong to a particular position in the caste hierarchy. If Brahmans are at the top of the ritual hierarchy the Gauntias are still at the top of the economic and political hierarchy.

Kinship studies are quite out of fashion in anthropology today, but the way the author has dealt with the subject in Chapter 5 is impressive. The author discusses the Aghria kinship system at three levels, which he finds functioning independent of each other. The first is the cognitive level or the level of kinship terminologies, which show the confluence of Dravidian, Indo-Aryan, and Central Indian or Mundaric languages. The second is normative level where he discusses the ideal caste rules, and the third is the level of practice, which is ego-centric. With abundant examples, the author concludes that the Aghria kinship system does not fit into any of the major kinship models.

Chapter 6 is on the life cycle. Like in the previous chapter, the subject matter for discussion in this chapter is nothing new, but the way the author has subjected the same old subjects to new forms of interpretation makes the chapter highly readable. Besides, fresh labelling like "diachronic affinity" and "semi-diachronic affinity" make the subject matter appear fresh as well. However, the more important contribution of the author lies perhaps in Chapter 7, where he shows how the agricultural cycle, ritual cycle, and the life cycle are interwoven and interdependent in Aghria society through the ritual idiom of the *khunt,* which literally means a post symbolizing 'sustenance of something'. The symbolic interpretation of the *khunt* in various social, economic, and political contexts of Aghria society is done very impressively in this chapter.

In Chapter 8, the concluding chapter, the author reiterates the importance of looking at the tribe-peasant relationship from the peasants' point of view, which is indeed missing in most anthropological literature.

Thus, the present work is certainly an important contribution, as it fills an important gap in anthropology, which has hitherto emphasized the isolation and distinctiveness of the tribes they studied rather than their symbiosis with other tribes, peasants and caste societies. Such symbiosis has very much been a subject of interest for anthropologists like Milton Singer, Mckim Marriott, Nirmal Kumar Bose, Surajit Sinha, and the like who focussed on the study of Indian civilization. This young scholar has proved them right and demonstrated the value of their thinking like no one perhaps did in the past. When one arrives at the end of the book, one tends to forgive the author for whatever limitations that might have crept into his methodology, as evident from the first chapter of his book. This book is perhaps one of the finest examples of what a modern ethnographic work could be like. The generous use of local terminologies makes this monograph more authentic than perhaps it would otherwise appear to be. Although a native speaker of north-west Orissa dialect might have been able to point a mistake or two in transcription as well as transliteration, such a speaker would be left more impressed than disappointed at the end of his/her reading of this ethnographically very rich book. I would particularly recommend to the young anthropologists, who still have some hope of improving their research and bringing more rigour in their research, to read this book. As a senior anthropologist, I wish every thesis I supervised or examined were like the one on which this book is based.■

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THE SASIA STORY
by Madanjeet Singh
UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador



A riveting and poignant story of a young idealist's activism and fervour and of the trauma that he suffered during the gruesome fratricidal conflict between India and Pakistan in the aftermath of partition. Mandanjeet Singh strongly believes that no country can develop without taking its entire people along nor can it safeguard its security and economic well-being unilaterally. Sasia is the name he has coined for South Asia's common currency in the hope that, like the Euro, it will become the anchor of economic stability and regional cooperation.

His objective in establishing the two voluntary, non-profit, non-political and secular organizations—Sumitra Foundation (1995) and South Asia Foundation (2000)—was essentially to create a youth movement through educational programmes and person-to-person cultural and economic interaction for the benefit of disadvantaged and marginalized communities in South Asia.

The photographs, rich and vibrant in colour, were mostly taken by the author and include historical documents as the hand-written preface by Jawaharlal Nehru to his extraordinary collection of black-and-white pictures.

"But here in this volume there is a different aspect of India — the common folk, the masses, the people. Again, they represent some odd types chosen from Kashmir in the North to Kanya Kumari in the far South. It might have been possible to choose an entirely different set of types and they would have been equally representative of this rather wonderful country of ours. But this set of pictures does give an idea of our people in the humbler ranks of society."

The pictures are good and I hope that many will derive pleasure from them and some understanding, as I have done.

New Delhi – January 9, 1949

Jawaharlal Nehru

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Agenda for Change

Mahesh Rangarajan

GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES: TRANSITIONS TO A SUSTAINABLE WORLD
By James Gustave Speth
Yale University Press, 2004, Indian edition, Orient Longman, Delhi, 2005, pp. 299, Rs. 395.00

James Gustave Speth is now Professor at the School of Forestry and Environmental Sciences at Yale, an institution founded a century ago by the legendary Bernhard Fernow. Having studied Law, Speth was one of the founders of the Natural Resources Defence Council. Equally useful in terms of his insights into governmental policymaking was his role as an advisor to Jimmy Carter, and his central role in the formulation of the Global 2000 Report. At the global level, he also headed the UN Development Programme at a time when its brief and manifest expanded in significant ways.

Global Environmental Challenges is both a look back at his vast experience in this field and also an attempt to draw together a workable agenda for forces of change in difficult times. The book not only lucidly and briefly sums up key challenges; it also catalogues where and who spearheads the efforts. A whole list of websites and sources makes this an especially valuable book for the concerned citizen as much as for the scholar.

Contrary to the optimism that marked the wave of the environmental movement a quarter century ago, things look a lot tougher now. This is nowhere as true as in the US, not only in official Washington DC but also in the profound and epochal changes in the body politic and culture of that vast country.

Speth is at his best in looking back at the factors that drove the environmental concern in the US in his formative years. The late 1960s—when he was a law student at Yale (where he now teaches, as a Professor)—were a time of intellectual and social ferment. Though he only alludes to it, they were also a time of great turmoil. The Tet offensive in Vietnam in the summer of 1968, a string of assassinations of leading political figures in the US and domestic unrest over civil rights and the war fed into and drew from concerns about the livability of the earth. The author points out how works like Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* published in 1962 undermined public faith in corporations. The public scientist, in the form of figures like Rene Dubois and Paul Ehrlich, Carson herself and Barry Commoner all played a key role in conscientiazation. Speth observes with prescience how the idea of the teach-in was taken from the civil rights movement and given a wider reach on earth day 22 April 1970.

The American political leadership, even figures as unlikely as Richard Nixon were impelled by public sentiment to enact fresh legislation and announce new measures for executive action. More than that, over the next decade, new institutional spaces were created not only in the US but also in international fora. Speth only alludes in passing to the great divide at the 1972 Stockholm conference between developed and developing countries. But he more than makes up in his careful attention to issues such as sanitation and water supply that spell the difference between life and death for millions in the developing world in town and even more so in the countryside.

The author sees glimmers of hope in initiatives not only in civil society at large but also in large corporate groups. He sees hope in business stewardship on the model of the voluntary cuts in fuel emission by BP and Shell. Mitsubishi, a huge forestry giant now only picks up sustainably produced timber. At a proactive level new groups like Conservation International are raising funds on an unprecedented scale to make land purchases of areas critical as refuge for vanishing biodiversity.

The wave of concern and action of the '1960s not only petered out by the turn of the century. It has attracted a severe backlash symbolized best by the US stonewalling of international treaties. It is sobering if accurate for someone like Speth who has played a key role in decision making to state that except for Jimmy Carter (1976-80), no American president has taken the issue of the environment seriously. He is perhaps less than fair to Bill Clinton who, though hamstrung by an uncooperative Congress, managed to continue making changes in the domestic sphere in an incremental fashion.

Yet, the backlash of the Bush years has been a long time coming. In the earlier phase, " the business community had been caught off guard, without time to marshal its troops or to gather its ammunition." The belief in the manifest destiny of the US has its counterpart in a view that limitless growth is possible with no serious thought about the constraints. There is of course a long history of American isolationism as with the League of Nations in the post-Woodrow Wilson era which is replaying itself in the environmental arena. It is more serious in its implications given the overwhelming military might and continuing economic power of the United States. This is a country that managed single-handedly to smother the Law of the Seas and is in the process of killing the Kyoto Protocol through sheer denial.

The role-played by key experts such as Bjorn Lomborg, and in a previous generation, Hermann Kahn and Julian Simon is examined and critically discussed in a convincing and lucid way. The restrained tone and measured voice actually makes the argument against such nay sayers even stronger. This is clearest on two key issues, the loss of biological diversity and the threat of climate change. Speth writes of how, " A string of Environmental Dr Panglosses …have intentionally or unintentionally lent a semblance of credibility to this denial, but it is still condition of denial, of not facing reality."

The author sees glimmers of hope in initiatives not only in civil society at large but also in large corporate groups. He sees hope in business stewardship on the model of the voluntary cuts in fuel emission by BP and Shell. Mitsubishi, a huge forestry giant now only picks up sustainably produced timber. At a proactive level new groups like Conservation International are raising funds on an unprecedented scale to make land purchases of areas critical as refuge for vanishing biodiversity.

Two caveats must be placed at this point. One is the limited attention to the movements for environmental justice not only in the developing world but also in the US. Issues of race and class are more closely linked to toxic dumping than many of the largely suburbia-led environmentalists of the late sixties fully grasped. A whole genre of work from William Cronon (also a Yale alumni and former teacher) to Carl Jacoby has of late questioned the centrality of unspoilt nature in American environmental advocacy. This legacy of displacement of resource dependant peoples in the continental US may well get replicated in American funded initiatives in developing countries. Perhaps there are closer links between certain kinds of conservation to certain kinds of conservatism.

That said, the other caveat is a more serious one. It pertains not to the past but the future. The leaderships of developing countries like China or emerging energy superpowers like Russia are even less mindful of ecological concerns than western democracies or established Third World democracies (read India, Brazil, South Africa). It is still unclear how these large countries will be brought around to a global environmental agenda.

These caveats should not stand in the way of a readable and important book that will serve as stimulus to all who care about the future.■

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In the Frontline of Planetary Battles

Rohan D'Souza

THE ENVIRONMENTALISM OF THE POOR: A STUDY OF ECOLOGICAL CONFLICTS AND VALUATION
By Joan Martinez-Alier
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2004, pp.312, Rs.575.00

This book is aimed at the very heart of belief in the modern world: the ineluctable faith in economic growth. The idea of progress tied to inexhaustible desire and the unrelenting quest for want driven development have, in concert, become elements central to the globalizing economy. In the media generated imagination, a rising stock market, increasing exports, consumer confidence and growing markets are loudly claimed to be the 'objective' indicators of universal salvation and by implication approximations to the virtuous and good life. But many justifiably ask, are these false gods or empty idols or a cult finally gone awry? Some discontents have gone so far as to argue that the neo liberal project, at this momentous apex of its fervour and triumph, has actually begun to come apart, most dramatically upon the very earthly roots of its existence. Economic growth is exposed for what it is: wealth essentially as a fatal accounting fiction made possible at a huge ecological loss. Put differently, the economy is not a miracle; it cannot conjure loaves and fish out of thin air or walk on water, it has real and evident environmental consequences.

Amidst this monstrous reality, understandably, many a prophet of doom has flourished, but fortunately as well there has also emerged clear voices for hope and more importantly those armed with clarity and precision in analysis. *The Environmentalism of the Poor* can categorically and refreshingly so be declared the latter. Its author, Joan Martinez-Alier is one of the most extraordinary ecological economists of our times and for almost three decades perhaps the grand inquisitor to the profligate heresies of neo-classical environmental economics. What Matinez-Alier reaffirms in the initial chapters is that profit-seeking markets are weak guides to explaining complex ecological realities. Similarly, the logic of pricing is a fallible and flawed instrument for relating to and organizing substances of Nature.

In a nutshell, neo-classical environmental economics 'falls apart' on one of its central claims — the commensurability of values in the Natural world. Rather, the author avers, Nature exists in and simultaneously straddles diverse physical and biological processes and has been historically mediated through an equally varied array of social and cultural values. A pure economic valuation based approach, in other words, cannot credibly help decide and determine the availability or use of natural endowments. Consequently, concepts making up the environmental economist's much touted tool kit such as contingent valuation, cost-benefit analysis or the environmental kuznet curve are all unmasked and revealed to be what they really are: slogans expressing relations of power. In contrast, Martinez-Alier unfurls the strength of alternative conceptual models that have been more capable of accommodating environmental concerns and that are currently being widely debated amongst ecological economists. A flavour of these different economic accounting strategies are made visible in his discussions on Multi-Criteria physical indicators, Human Appropriation of Net Primary Produce (HANPP), Energy Return on Energy Input (EROI), Material Input Per Unit Services (MIPS), Ecological Footprint Analysis and so on and so forth. Clearly, there are different ways and means for judging, contemplating and carrying out economic activity.

Environmentalism of the Poor, however, is not merely confined to the conceptual rubbishing of the money/profit imperative in environmental/ economic decision making, the book's profound appeal lies in the strong case it makes for going beyond ecological economics as well. The argument here, simply and crudely stated, is that economics cannot be viewed principally or only on its own terms: ecological economics must be creatively brought into dialogue with ecological distribution conflicts as extensively documented through rubrics such as political ecology, environmental justice, social ecology and so forth. Towards fostering such a dialogue, Martinez-Alier devotes roughly five chapters of the book to thick descriptive accounts of popular environmental struggles. The reader is nursed through a staggering global view of contemporary ecological conflicts that are or have been played out in several hot spots; the destruction of mangroves for shrimp farming in East Africa and South East Asia; agitation by indigenous communities against the oil industry in Nigeria and Guatemala; nuclear waste in the Yucca mountains in Western United States; mono-crop plantations in central America; bio-piracy fears in much of the 'Third World' and India's most celebrated struggles on the Narmada river and the Chipko movement.

Despite this grand survey approach Martinez-Alier, nevertheless, keeps much of the discussions close to several larger theoretical concerns such as the issue of 'externalities'; a term often used by neo-classical environmental economists to explain environmental degradation as emanating from the consequences of inadequate pricing. In other words, environmental degradation arises not as a result of the profit-seeking market but essentially because of a distorted market, which it is claimed indicates the failure to internalize actual costs.

Many other similar contestations are dealt with in these chapters, such as the question of market sustainability, urban ecological footprints, environmental racism, risk, normal science, and ecological debt. From this incredibly exhaustive exploration, one also begins to see his strong case for a third framework for discussing contemporary environmental issues through the notion of the '*environmentalism of the poor*'. This term, Martinez-Alier argues will correct the manner in which earlier struggles have been largely represented, namely through the notions of the 'cult of wilderness' and the 'gospel of eco-efficiency'. In the case of the former, the emphasis was on fighting a 'rearguard action'; the preservation of wild and beautiful landscapes without confronting questions of social inequities or politics. In the case of the latter, the strategy was essentially directed towards treating ecological issues as a managerial science. The central idea being to deploy policy instruments and good practices to mitigate environmental degradation without in any way significantly altering existing structures of power in society. Through the notion of environmentalism of the poor, however, environmental movements and degradations are linked directly to being reactions to economic growth. Martinez-Alier, therefore, frontally locates the contemporary environmental crisis within the context of politics and ecological distribution. This book is the supreme distillation of Martinez-Alier's many intense years of living on the frontlines of our greatest planetary battles. It is a war that we cannot afford to lose nor misunderstand.■

This book is aimed at the very heart of belief in the modern world: the ineluctable faith in economic growth. The idea of progress tied to inexhaustible desire and the unrelenting quest for want driven development have, in concert, become elements central to the globalizing economy. In the media generated imagination, a rising stock market, increasing exports, consumer confidence and growing markets are loudly claimed to be the 'objective' indicators of universal salvation and by implication approximations to the virtuous and good life. But many justifiably ask, are these false gods or empty idols or a cult finally gone awry?

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Green Havens

Bill Aitken

LISTEN TO THE MOUNTAINS: A HIMALAYAN JOURNAL
By Pamela Chatterjee
Viking Penguin, New Delhi, 2005, pp.174, Rs.295.00

BETWEEN THE EARTH AND SKY: THE PENGUIN BOOK OF FOREST WRITINGS
Edited by Savyasaachi
Penguin, New Delhi, 2005, pp.258, Rs.295.00

Both books under review share the immediate appeal of describing sylvan situations far from the polluted air of industrialized life. One is the journal of a migrant city dweller who finds fulfillment living in a hill village, the other an anthology of forest related writing that probes the mystique of trees and wild places. Missing from both (fortunately) is the traditional flagellant postures that tend to be associated with the Back to Nature movement, implying that the development of civilized society has been a falling away from a Garden of Eden ideal. However, the quest to regain a lost paradise is only part of our striving. Just as real is the dim biological recall of our ancestral hominids who fled wild animals by resorting to tree climbing. Anything arboreal to the modern psyche is a source of comfort—but only in theory. In practice even the most luxurious of five star tree-huts will prove disconcerting once the novelty wears off. Forests and wilderness areas are OK for short stints but in the long term they are better read about in the pulped state than experienced in the raw. Which tourist brochure ever owns up to the existence of mosquitoes and leeches avidly waiting to suck the visitors' blood in God's Own Country?

Life away from the urban jungle can be a punishing alternative for the city dweller unless he or she is both physically and mentally tough. Anyone who has met in a Delhi drawing room any of the remarkable "Bhagat girls" knows they don't come tougher and more enterprising than this. Years ago when I wrote about a seriously life threatening trek I had a letter from Pamela Chatterjee (nee Bhagat) asking for further details. Her adventurous decision (after educating her daughters)to move from Bombay to the Kumaon village of Kausani sounded promisingly pragmatic. She was not going as one more do-gooder but as a genuine student of life in the mountains. As a senior citizen her interventions are subtle but all the more effective for that. A word to the irrigation engineer and the water begins to flow. A complaint in high places against an official who sells seeds at an inflated price leads to an initial bluster at the local level followed by a correction in the rates.

To be a woman in village Kumaon entails an unrelenting round of drudgery. Extraordinarily even in the midst of their gruelling exploitation these ladies display all the feminine virtues. To add to the book's authentic recreation of the daily grind are the vibrant sketches of Catherine Addor–Confino that catch the fluid beauty of these home grown athletes. In spite of its slim stature this Himalayan journal fills a void that the more famous Himalayan Journal(s) concerned with peak bagging ignores, namely detailing with affection the everyday life of the village residents , and recording their joys and sorrows. Chatterjee illustrates how amidst the harsh thrall of the seasons and the mindless code of caste cruelty small beauties declare themselves to those who seek. Though written in a low key as random jottings, this diary reveals an intelligent observer who enquires into the whys of human behaviour. She remarks on the contrast between the relationships that hold between families in stressful cities and those brought up in the lap of nature. The author is reluctant to judge and prefers instead to laud the superstitious villagers' willingness to share what little they have with an outsider. Generosity among hill people may be the result of having hosted pilgrims to Dev Bhumi for millennia. Having lived for four years in Kausani myself (before the author moved there), I was heartened to read that the lot of women at least hasn't got any worse. In the 1960's there were dire predictions of drought and desertification which would have put an intolerable burden on the womenfolk who contribute all the labour. Both books express concern over the need to harmonize the requirements of man and the demands of nature. Savyasaachi's forest collection talks of the "interdependence of creatures belonging to the cycle of life". The editor has included articles from Kerala to Kullu and this wide range of interest reminds us that anthologies ("bouquets of flowers") were ideally compiled after a lifetime of sampling, by retired professors who had not entirely lost their faculties. Charmed over a lifespan by memorable pieces a la Palgrave, you had a book that found space on the bedside table before the invention of sleeping pills. Nowadays there appear to be two scenarios. First the publisher on discovering he has sufficient material for an anthology hires an author's name as editor and the latter is asked to write a foreword to stuff he has neither chosen nor read. Having played along at shortchanging the reader, which writer will complain when he finds the book finally released under a more famous name (who likewise has neither chosen nor read the collection)? The second scenario is more encouraging . A rising academic is chosen to present a selection of sometimes original and often outspoken articles which do everything except send you to sleep.

Savyasaachi's *Penguin Book of Forest Writing* makes for a fascinating survey of the different genres of writing that invoke the spirit of wooded places. The selection is a good mix of the scholarly, literary and shikari. The editor begins with Nancy Sandars' translation from Gilgamesh (located downstream of the Garden of Eden) and this fragment from an ancient epic helps explain why the only cedar tree you are likely to see in the Middle East nowadays is on the national flag of Lebanon. Just as Pamela Chatterjee's journal is structured on the changing seasons, *Between the Earth and Sky* is in four sections – Canopy, Clearing, Dwelling and Threshold. The weightiness of Sri Aurobindo offsets the lyricism of Guru Nanak and the inclusion of the Yakshi's questioning of Yudhisthira is a neat assertion of how profundity can be conveyed in the pithy. Oddly, the observation that humans are impervious to the inevitability of death carries no overtones of the unique Hindu perspective on the cyclic nature of the soul. Come to think of it, could the vanaprastha ashram of ancient India have been a cottage industry version of euthanasia? Retire to the jungle after a life of comfort and if the wild animals don't get you, the insects will. As a practical footnote for city slickers who wish to live out their dream of a simple life, remember (as Gandhiji did in Sevagram) that it is no disadvantage to have a saintly seth (like Jamnalal Bajaj) as the underwriter of your experiment.

The middle section of the collection could be called "tiger woods" with articles by Jim Corbett, Brigadier Burton and Ruskin Bond and balancing the sporting aspect are several articles (including fiction) by social anthropologists on the tribal understanding of forest living. Apart from a mention of the burning injustice meted out to the Narmada oustees there are no overt political references nor any ideological slant that (for example) mars the objectivity of the Anthropological Survey's Peoples of India series (where, at the very outset, the editing anthropologist succumbs to the opinion of Savarkar and describes the Sepoy Uprising of 1857 in Hindu nationalist terms.)

The blurb of a tourist brochure I have just read in my dentist's waiting room, for a new state carved out of Middle India's tribal forest lands describes the forest as an enigma and this is well put because it does happen to be an area both welcoming and forbidding. This is illustrated by the editor's concern to show conflicting attitudes towards the tiger in mythology and on the ground. The dichotomy is also reflected in the current cooption of the adivasi milieu by its polar opposite the Sanskritized, a strategy determined by the politics of evangelization.

The final article on medicinal herbs by Francis Zimmermann is a highly stimulating account of the confusion that exists over the concept and semantics of "jungle" and "forest." It is weird that the original Sanskrit term for jungle today is nearer in meaning to the desert of Rajasthan (where the classical Saraswati disappears into the sand) than to the luxuriant tangle of Arunachal Pradesh. The last word on the simple life (at least for this unromantic oldie) was spoken by a Scottish lowlander who, as we viewed a Highlander's croft remarked :" If that's being at peace with the world, I'd rather be at war."

Bill Aitken has written travelogues on India's rivers, mountains and railways.

The Never Ending Debate

Kumkum Roy

THE ARYAN DEBATE
Edited by Thomas R. Trautmann
Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2005, pp. xiiv+289, Rs 545.00

As students of early Indian history know only too well, the Aryan question just refuses to go away. It remains the subject of conversation in middle-class homes, and, in the last decade or so, has been the theme of stormy academic (and not-so-academic) debates. It is in this context that this volume in the Oxford University Press *Debates* series is most welcome.

At the outset, Trautmann lays down the criteria for including and excluding essays from the anthology. Essays that "were excessively polemical and personal in their attacks" (p. xi), have, understandably enough, not found their way into this collection of generally measured, scholarly writings. Also excluded are those works that have acquired a great deal of visibility and popularity, but are not written by specialists. In the process, most of the fury and passion that have surrounded the question has been carefully excised.

Trautmann steers the reader through the anthology with a masterly, typically understated introduction. He classifies positions in the debate in terms of what he defines as the standard view of the Aryans as outsiders, which is juxtaposed with the alternative view of the Aryans as indigenous. Both these polarized positions are then refined and qualified. Perhaps the most notable of these qualifications is Trautmann's quiet insistence that the first viewpoint cannot be reduced to the Aryan Invasion Theory (the AIT that makes its presence felt in newspaper articles with unfailing regularity). Also valuable is his suggestion that distinctions between history and historiography are important—much of the debate has been marred by an often deliberate blurring of these categories.

The way Trautmann identifies three nodal issues in the debate is useful in clarifying our understanding. Two of these issues revolve around historical linguistics—the recognition of the Indo-European family of languages as well as of the Dravidian family. The third issue centres on archaeology—the vexed question of assigning a linguistic and/or racial/ethnic identity to the authors of the Harappan civilization. Evaluating responses to these issues, Trautmann argues, is critical if we are to appreciate the positions adopted by scholars in the debate.

The essays are grouped under three broad rubrics. The first is historical and consists of pronouncements on the major discoveries—of common elements in Indo-European languages, of the distinctive features of Dravidian as opposed to Sanskrit and related languages, and of the Harappan civilization. Some of the excerpts, as for instance, William Jones' statement on the Indo-European languages, read like cryptic assertions. Nonetheless, the selection is useful in laying out the historical background for the later, more heated debates.

The second section focuses centrally on questions of historical linguistics. While some of the essays, such as those of M.B. Emeneau, M.A. Mehendale and Madhav M. Deshpande, may appear somewhat technical to the non-specialist, they convey a sense of the complexities and uncertainties involved in linguistic analysis. These essays demand patient and careful reading, but the effort is more than worth it as, at the very least, one is left with a sense of the range of scholarly strategies that go into the making of our understanding of language change and its significance.

Non-specialists will find the essays by Trautmann and Romila Thapar more accessible. These essays complement one another, and exemplify how the intricacies of linguistic analyses are simplified and reduced to slogans of political agendas. What is interesting is the reminder that such appropriations have taken place in a variety of contexts and from different perspectives. These contributions illuminate a point Trautmann makes at the outset: 'the history of the deep past often becomes the object of intense public debate because ancient history serves as a *charter for society* or for a particular vision of what society should be' (p. xv, italics original).

The last section focuses on the Harappan civilization, which includes a discussion on the archaeological evidence in general, the horse in particular, and the enigmatic Harappan script. What Trautmann identifies as the "standard" understanding of the relationship between the Aryans and the Harappan civilization is presented through an excerpt from Shereen Ratnagar's *Understanding Harappa.* Her conclusions are restrained but categorical: "We can only confirm that the movements and migrations reconstructed by historical linguistics are not contradicted by archaeological evidence for migrations, in terms of period and direction of movement" (p.142).

The articles representing the "alternative" understanding by B.B. Lal and S. P. Gupta are somewhat more problematic. While the editor issues a statutory warning in his brief introduction to Colin Renfrew's essay, one wishes he had signposted some of the problems with the other articles as well. Curiously, scholars who advocate an Aryan origin for the Harappan civilization seem to be preoccupied with attributing a naïve belief in the Aryan Invasion Theory to their opponents, although it is clear that those who support the "standard" understanding now work with a far more nuanced understanding of migrations and questions of language replacement. In reiterating and then attempting to demolish the theory of invasions, proponents of the alternative understanding often deliberately or otherwise obfuscate issues in the debate.

Besides, S.P. Gupta in particular draws on Vedic evidence in a rather arbitrary fashion. To cite just one instance, he uses references to *panis* (translated as traders) in the *Rgveda* to argue for the importance of sea trade in the text, and this is then projected as "proof" of parallels between the *Rgveda* and the Harappan civilization. What one misses is any acknowledgement of the fact that the text reveals an ambivalent if not positively hostile attitude towards *panis* (p 192). Elsewhere (p 195) the mention of bricks in the *Satapatha Brahmana* is cited as proof of familiarity with the kind of urban architecture that is associated with the Harappan civilization. Given that the *Satapatha Brahmana* is a text that relates to the Ganga-Yamuna doab and regions to the East, extrapolating evidence from it in the search for parallels with the Harappan civilization is far fetched, to say the least.

Readers will probably find the discussion on the horse far more rewarding. While there is a certain amount of repetition (Lal's text occurs twice: pp 152-153 and 232-33), the papers by the specialists, Sandor Bokonyi, Richard H. Meadow and Ajita Patel are enlightening. As in the case of the contributions from historical linguistics, one is left with a sense of the complications involved in analysis, and in the tentative nature of the findings, which is refreshingly different from the strident assertions of pro-horse and anti-horse lobbies.

Kamil V. Zvelebil's insightful essay on the Harappan script and his careful evaluation of claims to decipherment provides a fitting conclusion to this rich collection. He lists the well-known impediments to decipherment and provides an agenda for future investigations, reiterating the potential of structural /formal analyses as opposed to conjectural phonetic reconstructions.

The Series Editor's Note (p. ix) states that: "The approach, in this series, is to encourage the interrogation of history, as distinct from presenting history as a collection of 'given' facts. The idea is to bring to the readers the research base upon which scholars have founded their interpretative framework and open to students bridge-heads into the terrain of research." This anthology amply validates this strategy.■

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Man Ahead of His Times

P.R. Chari

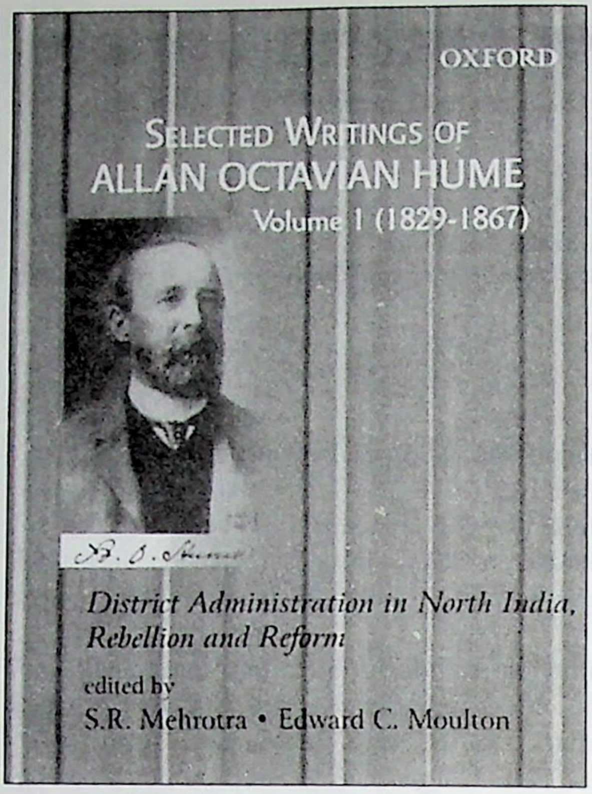
SELECTED WRITINGS OF ALLAN OCTAVIAN HUME, VOLUME I (1829-1867): DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION IN NORTH INDIA, REBELLION AND REFORM
Edited by S.R.Mehrotra and Edward C. Moulton
Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2004, pp.xxi+786, Rs. 1500.00

This is the first of four large volumes, chronologically arranged, that detail major aspects of the life and times of Allan Octavian Hume; he is better known to students of Indian history as the founder and general secretary of the Indian National Congress between 1885 and 1894. Hume joined the Indian Civil Service in 1850 and was allocated to the North-Western Provinces (now Uttar Pradesh) cadre, and served for 32 years before resigning from the Service. Little was known of Hume's early life and upbringing in England until this painstaking research was undertaken by the editors over some 12 years. Or about his official career, which witnessed, due to his critical disposition and intellectual honesty, his humiliating demotion from being a Secretary to the Government of India, and reversion to the Board of Revenue in the North-Western Provinces; or his brief flirtation with theosophy thereafter before immersing himself in advaita philosophy; or his lifelong passion for ornithology; or his contributions to agricultural improvement that were significant. These aspects of his singular personality are the subject matter of these volumes.

The present volume focuses on Hume's early life and education, which included some years in the junior school of University College, London, and a stint in the East India Company's Haileybury College which trained new entrants into the Indian Civil Service before posting them out to India. It also includes the period when Hume worked in the districts of the North-Western Provinces between 1850 and 1867, seventeen years in all, of which the latter nine years were spent as collector and district magistrate in only one district, Etawah. It was considered a backward district at that time, and was given to general lawlessness. A century and a half later, and despite some six decades having elapsed since Independence, Etawah continues to remain backward and lawless. Part of the reason is that a collector and district magistrate would be fortunate now to continue in one district for a year at the most, according to statistics, before being transferred out, and before coming to know the district. Hume's contributions to the development of Etawah included expanding vernacular education, promoting modern medicine and sanitation, establishing municipal government, extending road communications and so on. That he was able to achieve all this in his tenure is a reflection not merely of his prodigious energy but also the trust reposed in these early administrators by the government of that time.

The period 1850-67 that Hume spent in the districts witnessed momentous events, including the rebellion (Indian Mutiny) of 1857-58 when he, along with the European population of Etawah found refuge in the Agra Fort. A final part of this volume concerns itself with his reconstruction and reforms in the Etawah district and to Hume's differences with the Government on such radical reforms as establishing a provincial reformatory for juvenile offenders. There are fascinating insights to be found in Hume's writings scattered throughout this volume. Attention might be drawn to two significant observations on issues that are as relevant to basic issues of public administration as when they were made 150 years ago.

The causes of the rebellion of 1957-58, for instance, continue to generate controversy. Was it triggered by the greased cartridges issue? Or the iniquities of the infamous "doctrine of lapse"? Or a despairing attempt to resurrect the dying Mughal Empire? Hume believed it was caused by disregard of "one great law", respect for the "will of the majority." He explains, "Other proximate causes led to a more rapid development of popular discontent, but it was the system of legislating not only without reference to the opinions of the people, but in direct opposition to their wishes, that sowed the seeds of revolution." Continuing, he indicts, " ...a Government deeming itself impregnably strong, dealing with a people it believed to be hopelessly weak—a government full indeed of excellent intentions, but at times oblivious of that high truth on which real freedom essentially depends—a government in fact presuming to constitute itself the Supreme Judge of national interests, and fancying itself



authori-zed to defeat or dis-regard the wishes of those, as whose representatives alone it occupied the posts entrusted to it." Embedded in this sonorous, Gibbonian prose are timeless values that have often been ignored in post-Independent India; witness the present situation, which makes few scratches on the minds of the Government of India that fully a fourth of the districts in the country are afflicted today with Naxalite and Left extremist violence, largely caused by injustice and the failure to heed "the will of the majority".

Hume's views on education were equally radical. He believed that Indians exposed to western education had overwhelmingly supported the English during the rebellion (Indian Mutiny) that found its leadership among the traditional and feudal classes. This was factually correct. Further, he believed that widespread elementary education, in preference to higher education, was of the essence. Trenchantly, he observed, " The foundation of any healthy and comprehensive scheme of Education must be laid amongst the masses, let but the root pierce deeply and spread widely through soil judiciously loosened and leaf, flower and fruit, will burst out and bloom spontaneously in one season. Hitherto our great Colleges have yielded little but disappointment...rootless hot house nurselings!....I would entirely reverse the existing practice, I would care less about stately universities, while I would devote our chief care, our last energies, to sowing thickly, and widely through the land, good elementary schools for the people". The debate regarding the proper emphasis on elementary and higher education continues unresolved to this day.

Hume, however, viewed religious schools with extreme disfavour as being "useless, nay worse...pernicious," over which no control could be exercised either over the Masters or the course of studies. Regarding the Masters, Hume was scathing, observing that, "too many of them, [are] of doubtful character and extreme ignorance, while the best of them, taken as a class, are irregular and careless in their performance of their duties, bigoted beyond conception, harsh to the majority of the boys, servile to the children of a few rich parents and content, or able to teach most of their scholars only an imperfect smattering of Indian Persian or execrable Sanscrit..." Sadly, the politically sponsored rejuvenation of madrassas and pathshalas in present-day Uttar Pradesh has successfully revived this decadent system of education, and led to the spawning of religious fundamentalism and sectarian violence.

Hume's pronounced radical but liberal beliefs on several other issues relevant to our times. They reveal vignettes of a man far ahead of his times, and almost prophetic in his pronouncements. At a surface level, his writings provide a glimpse into the hopes, aspirations and workings of a many-splendoured individual, with a lively interest in several unrelated areas of knowledge and human endeavour. This was a hallmark, incidentally, of many early members of the Indian Civil Service. But, at a deeper level, his views provide an informed perspective on the social and economic history of the latter half of the nineteenth century. The present and its companion volumes will prove of immense interest to both professional historians and career administrators.

Subsequent volumes in this series pertaining to Hume's writings are entitled Challenges and Disappointments in the Raj, Science and Culture: Indian Ornithology, Theosophy and Religion, and Champion of Indian Nationalism and Regeneration.■

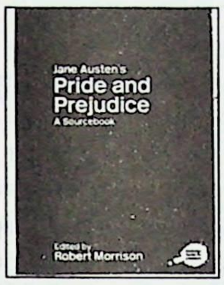
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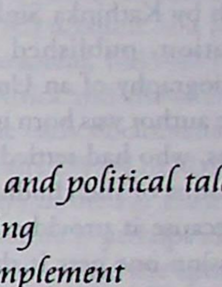
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A Tale of Wanderings

Rohit K. Wanchoo

MUNSHI RAHMAN KHAN: AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF AN INDIAN INDENTURED LABOURER
Translated by Kathinka Sinha-Kerkhoff, Ellen Bal and Alok Deo Singh
Shipra Publications, Delhi, 2005, pp. 271, Rs. 495.00

> This is not the story of people who rose in revolt or of those who mobilized against the planters or the state. ...This is the prose, or poetry, of conformity and not of insurgency; it is an account of everyday forms of cooperation rather than resistance.

The *Autobiography of An Indian Indentured Labourer* by Munshi Rahman Khan is a volume that is the English translation of the autobiography of a first generation indentured worker who migrated from Uttar Pradesh in India to Dutch Surinam in Latin America. He left India in 1898 at the age of twenty-four and died in Surinam in 1972, where his family grew and prospered slowly. His autobiography, *Jeevan Prakash*, written in Devanagri and more or less completed in 1943, has been translated into English by Kathinka Sinha-Kerkhoff, Ellen Bal and Alok Deo Singh. This translation, published in 2005 by Shipra Publications, is truly the 'Autobiography of an Unknown Indian.'

The author was born in 1874 in Uttar Pradesh, the descendant of Afghan Pathans, who had settled in Jalalpur. The first part of the autobiography is an account of the childhood and youth of Rahman Khan. It is a valuable text because it provides a glimpse of life in India at the local level. The impression one gets is that life in the locality was strongly influenced by religious and caste identities, but conflict was either muted or absent. The mind of Rahman Khan, and probably that of the other rural folk as well, is suffused with ideas about the role of magic and miracles in the life of individuals and communities. The role of fate and God's will is routinely invoked in Rahman's autobiography.

As the translators observe rightly in the introduction, Rahman Khan's autobiography reveals that the upper-caste Hindus and Muslims were considered on par and had good relations with each other. The legend of Jalal Khan Wali's tomb, however, indicates that Muslim respect or pride would not allow even grateful Hindus to contribute to the upkeep of the Wali's Tomb, although its subsequent neglect led to the decline of Jalalpur. When the author went to school he was treated well by his Hindu teacher, probably softened by the gift of foodgrain by his father. Local life seems devoid of conflict though caste and religious differences are recorded with unfailing regularity: the Ahir milkmen, the Kayastha teacher, the Chamar workmen, the Hindu Kshatriya Raja, the benign Muslim Zamindar and the Hindu rituals associated with the digging of the well by Chetram Marwari.

Rahman Khan was a proud, honest and hard-working man who quickly won the trust of the plantation owners in Surinam with whom he worked. He was fair to his subordinates and loyal to his employers. He learnt to speak Nengre and Javanese which helped him become a Sardar by 1901. He was willing to speak his mind and question the competence of his superiors, even his European employers and social superiors. After serving his five year contract Rahman became a free man and began life as an independent farmer. Gradually he prospered, settled his four sons and married his two daughters. In fact, he spent a lot of his own money to run the Horst plantation after the fortunes of the owners declined and they ran up large debts; he did that again with an American plantation owner as well. The autobiography seems to present Rahman in very good light as a model immigrant. Rahman is not a rebel or a radical, but an intelligent man, sincere and godfearing, who wanted to prosper in life. He believed that with the blessings of Allah and his own hard work he made good.

Rahman Khan was proud not only of his education but also of the fact that he knew the *Ramayana* and the Hindu scriptures a lot better than most Hindus, including those who were preachers and Brahmins. He mentions how he became a very popular preacher of the *Ramayana* and was widely respected by members of all communities in Surinam. Yet the role of superstition and magical interventions increases in his life in Surinam. Although he did not believe in ghosts or spirits he records how his closest friend Subhan died after seeing certain glowing figures near the river and that he consulted a black man, Bachau, who was an expert in magic about it. His wife was subsequently possessed by an evil spirit that almost killed her. He managed to save her with the help of a practitioner of black magic. When he fell seriously ill it could not be tackled by modern medicine. A black practitioner of magic cured him after the doctors had failed to do so. Faith in the magical and the supernatural remains a constant theme in the *Jeevan Prakash*, although at times Rahman Khan shows his disdain for it.

The autobiography tells us about life on the plantations, the different groups that worked there and their conditions of work. This is not the story of people who rose in revolt or of those who mobilized against the planters or the state. Therefore many historians of the subaltern school, who study the consciousness or role of rebels, will not find this autobiography very interesting. This is the prose, or poetry, of conformity and not of insurgency; it is an account of everyday forms of cooperation rather than resistance. Rahman Khan may not generate as much interest among historians as Baba Ramchandra, the Maulvi of Fyzabad and Birsa Munda have done.

Rahman Khan was distressed by the role of the Arya Samaj leaders and of the Sanatan Hindus who organized a social boycott of Muslims. In March 1933, on the occasion of the marriage of Rahman Khan's youngest daughter a verbal duel between the Imam Kallan Mian and Puroshottam Singh, a Hindu guest of Rahman, led to an escalation of tension. There was a demand for a public apology by Kallan Mian and the social boycott of Muslims began. Although the Hindu extremists wanted to boycott both the Muslims and the low caste Chamars, Rahman argued that the " phoney Brahmins," whose earnings depended on having about 20 to 80 low caste followers, decided only to boycott the Muslims. In a period of growing alienation the Muslims sacrificed a cow for the first time and the Hindus killed a pig on Id in Livorno in 1933. The efforts of the extremists to drive a wedge between the Hindus and Muslims that had failed earlier now bore fruit. The author blames Dayanand Saraswati and the Arya Samajis for the spread of hostility towards the Muslims. It was the Sanatanis, however, who began the process of reconverting poor and illiterate Muslims after *shuddhi.* Firm action by the government prevented a riot after the killing of a pig near the Masjid in 1934.

The author takes up cudgels against the leaders of the Sanatan Dharma and laments that it is the Hindu community leaders who extended the boycott to the whole of Surinam. Rahman enters into a poetic duel with the Hindu spokesman and preacher Ramnarayan Mishra. Rahman was appalled that the Sanatan pandits had converted six Muslims, of whom one was a prostitute and another was her pimp. He thought Hindus in India ought to be informed that Sanatan Dharma pandits were adopting policies in Surinam that were not sanctioned by the Vedas. As Rahman says even if a hundred or two hundred Muslims converted to Sanatan Dharma it would do no harm to Islam but the Sanatan Dharma would not gain anything from it. There is no tradition of conversion in Sanatan Dharma and the issue of reconversions would only intensify communal tensions. Rahman Khan asserted that if the Sanatans could prove that their actions were justified they "could even make Brahmins of Sudras and Sudras of Brahmins like the Arya Samajis and no one would even dare to oppose" them.

In April 1934 both the Sanatan and Arya Samaj groups came together to organize a boycott against the Muslims. Those who violated these strictures

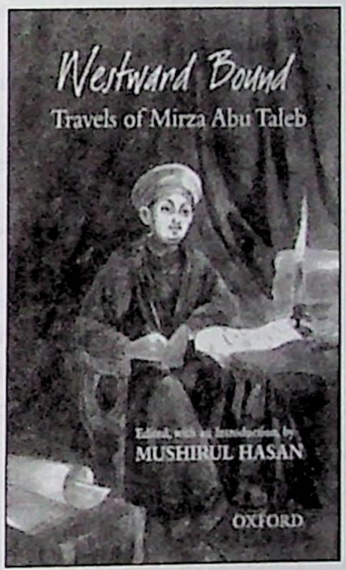
were punished or humiliated. Rahman recounts with relish that in India, a land of 20 crore Sanatanis, the Muslims who were in a minority sacrificed cows at Ayodhya in 1934 because they were permitted by their religion to do so. The Hindus who had rioted were fined by the British government. There was no religious sanction for the killing of pigs by Hindus. Hindus in Surinam resorted to such acts and the boycott only to antagonize the Muslims. The autobiography concludes abruptly with the end of the boycott in May 1943 after ten years. The conflict ended, but it left some scars. The trajectory of Hindu-Muslim conflict in Surinam is remarkable from the point of view of the South Asian history. Hindu-Muslim confrontation there ended at a time when in India it escalated and culminated in Partition and communal violence. One definitely needs to know more about the reasons for this.

The autobiography of Rahman Khan can be regarded as a valuable historical source which gives us insights into the life and beliefs of a first generation indentured worker. It would be instructive to compare it with other such accounts of overseas Indians in Trinidad, Fiji or Mauritius. The story has a happy ending both from the point of view of the author himself and the relations between Hindus and Muslims in Surinam.■

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Between Civilizations

Rana Nayar



WESTWARD BOUND: TRAVELS OF MIRZA ABU TALEB
Translated by Charles Stewart. Edited with an Introduction by Mushirul Hasan
Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2005,
pp. 346, Rs. 495.00

Travel literature has all along remained a relatively neglected sub-genre, at least, in the realm of literary studies. Perhaps, it would have continued to be so, had it not been for the aggressive, militant postures of the postcolonial theorists. They believe that travel and/or exploration is imbricated in and complicit with the history of expansionism and colonialism. Guided by this belief, they have not only put travel literature on their agenda, making it into a subject of insistent critical inquiry and scrutiny, but also imposed upon it new ideological masks of conquest and/or defeat.

Of late, the discipline of cultural studies has shown a growing inclination to resurrect old travelogues, and read or re-read them. Some time back, *Guardian* carried a rather longish piece on the re-release of the English the translation of a notable Arabian traveller Ibn Battutah's (1304-78) copious work mapping his twenty-eight years of peregrinations across India, Far East, Africa, Egypt, South Russia, Spain et al. The book under review, originally written in Persian by Mirza Abu Taleb in 1806, translated into English by Charles Stewart in 1810, and now edited by Mushirul Hasan in 2005, too, falls in much the same category.

The first English translation of this travelogue was serialized in the supplement to *Calcutta Gazette* between 1807 and 1808. Such was the resounding success of this travelogue in both Persian and English that soon enough, it was translated into French and German, too.

Unlike in the past, the cultural theorists are no longer dismissive of travelogues as personal, impressionistic pieces of weary travellers, but treat them as serious little jigsaw puzzles of ethnography, anthropology and social/cultural history. What makes travel writing both unique and problematic is that it consistently defies all efforts at neat classification. Not so much of a limitation, this is often regarded as the real strength of this form of writing. For it's only when it jumps the rigid, narrow boundaries of academic disciplines that it truly becomes a fit subject for multidisciplinary approach.

While one cannot really say how far and to what extent a particular travel document may become an autobiography, social history or cultural anthropology, one can always identify a host of factors that determine its complex, amalgamated character. Often, it is the personal attitude/training of the writer that matters as much as does his understanding of the projected audience for whose benefit he writes. Of course, the other unstated objectives such as compulsions of race, moment and milieu also become equally significant.

Although a huge corpus of travel literature has been created over the centuries in almost all languages of the world, not much seems to have been done to document the history of this form of writing. Ironically, its beginnings and also its later offshoots remain shrouded in mystery, as no clear evidence is available on either. According to some sources, one of the earliest travel documents is *The Journeying of the Master of the Captains of Egypt*, an anonymous work often traced back to 1400 BC.

While the Greeks cite Xenophon's (430 BC) epic narrative about the return of the *Ten Thousand from Sardis* as an early travel document, the Romans accord the same place to Horace's (65-8 BC) account of a journey to Brundisium. However, it is *The Histories of Herodotus*, (485-425 BC), a fascinating account of extensive travels in Egypt, Africa and elsewhere, that is better known outside of Europe. In the East, the early documents are to be found in China, either in the accounts of Fa-Hian's (399-414 AD) travels in India or of Shaman Hwui-Li's (630 AD) journeys in the Far East.

Though the urge to travel and create travel literature is perhaps as old as is man's longing to explore other lands/peoples/places, it was the apotheosis of European Renaissance that gave an unprecedented fillip to both these activities. If Petrarch's *Mountain Ventoux* (1336), a personal allegory defines one end of the spectrum, Richard Hakluyt's *Principall Navigations, Voiyages and Discoveries of the English Nation* (1589), an overtly imperialistic chronicle, defines the other.

Much of the travel literature emerging out of Western Europe during Renaissance was willy-nilly implicated in the ideology of mercantile capitalism. In most of these cases, the personal expeditions and explorations were either state-sponsored or royalty-funded, and behind it all lay egregious national 'interest' or 'compulsion' to discover new trade routes. While this was the case with most of the western nations, the story was markedly different in the eastern countries.

Here, the travellers and explorers often had to fall back either on their own resources or depend exclusively upon the patronage of their individual benefactors. The volume of traffic from East to West was so negligible, and the actual journeys, so hazardous that it often chipped away at whatever little urge travellers had to document their experiences.

It is up against this backdrop that we need to study or examine Mirza Abu Taleb's *Travels*. Though not a pioneer in this field, his *Travels* become an interesting, even intriguing, tour de force by virtue of having been produced at a critical juncture in Indian history. This is the time when the East India Company was fast consolidating its political and administrative hold over the Indian principalities and was also engaged in an equally dubious enterprise of producing, disseminating and institutionalizing Orientalist discourse.

As a matter of fact, Mirza Abu Taleb's *Travels* could possibly be read as a document that, at once, legitimizes and delegitimizes Orientalist constructions. The extent to which he colluded with the Orientalist discourse (for he was expected to establish a Persian language institute at Oxford or London, a mission he ultimately failed to fulfill owing to a variety of reasons) he was of a devil's party without knowing it, and the extent to which he offered a sustained critique of the British life, customs, morals, character and culture in his writings, he could be seen as an advocate of 'Orientalism-in-reverse.'

As a professional historian of repute, Mushirul Hasan had this rare opportunity to wrestle with some of these contentious issues while editing and introducing Mirza Abu Taleb's *Travels*. However, he has chosen not to locate this particular travelogue either within the framework of the 'Orientalist discourse' or that of 'Orientalism-in-reverse,' but has instead opted for the polemical context defined by the "interaction and contact

between the civilizations" (p. x). His contention is that while the western scholars have now for a long time been engaged in constructing their epistemology of Islam, it's about time the Muslim scholars, too, started constructing their own epistemology of the West. To quote him, "Muslim perceptions of the West are no less deserving of study than Western perceptions of Islam" (p. xi). "Clash of" or "contact between civilizations," is apparently the new buzzword that now governs the re-reading of old travelogues, and re-ordering of the world history.

Much before Abu Taleb set out to explore Europe, Asia and Africa in general or England in particular in 1799, Munshi Itesammudin had already produced his *Shigurf Nama-i-Velayet* (based on his year-and-a-half stay in Britain) in 1765, and Dean Muhammad, his *Travels* (1793-94). But more than any of his predecessors or successors, it is Mirza Abu Taleb who impresses with the range of his scholarship, the depth of his vision and above all, the ironic and detached view of both the peoples and places he describes. His translator Charles Stewart (Professor of Oriental Languages at East India College, Haileybury) went to the extent of saying, this was the first time ever that "the genuine opinions of an Asiatic, respecting the institutions of Europe" appeared in English. But how far one could go along with this viewpoint is another matter, altogether.

Mirza Abu Taleb Khan was a Lucknow born (b. 1752) erudite scholar, an accomplished soldier and a minor poet of Persian language. Though his father had left Persia and migrated to Awadh, all his life he never quite lost touch with his Persian roots. If it wasn't Persia, it was Persian language and literature through which he kept his relationship with his native country alive. Even in the travelogue, he liberally quotes from the works of Persian poets such as Hafiz, Roumy and Sady et al. Not only this, he also was a poet of sorts, who, during his sojourn in England, composed odes either in praise of English women or the city of London, both of which he was apparently quite enamoured of. His father had to flee Isfahan because of the tyrannies of Nadir Shah (1688-1747) and seek refuge in Awadh. His decision to settle down in Lucknow was guided by the fact that his wife's brothers, too, had migrated there from Persia two generation earlier.

Displeased with his father's conduct, Nawab Shujaa-ad-Dowleh stripped him of all the privileges and put him under surveillance. That led to his father's second flight to Murshidabad. After the death of Abu Taleb's father, Shujaa-ad-Dowleh softened his hostility toward the family, and provided money to his mother to ensure that Abu was given the best education possible. With the accession of Asaf al-Daula (1775-97), Abu Taleb returned to Awadh to serve as Etawah's *samildar*. This is when he came into contact with "the English." Colonel Hannay, his superior, entrusted him with the task of revenue collection while Nathaniel Middleton, the Resident (1773-82), enlisted his support to suppress the rebellion of a recalcitrant chieftain, Raja Balbhadra Singh. In 1792, he returned to Lucknow, armed with letters of recommendation from Cornwallis, Governor General of India, but when the Nawab refused to help, he went back to Calcutta in 1795.

On account of all this, he was quite depressed when Captain David Thomas Richardson (d.1808), a Scotsman, offered to fund his travels to Europe, an offer he accepted after initial hesitation. And *Masir-i-Talibi- fi-Bilad-i Afrang* was the outcome of his wanderings across several continents. Unlike most travel documents, this one has not been either conceived or produced in the characteristic, anecdotal style. An organized traveller, Abu Taleb maintained a regular diary, in which he recorded only the general impressions of what he saw and experienced, not the residual images of fleeting nature. Small wonder, his work shows a remarkable degree of structuring and internal order, rarely ever associated with the rambling travelogues. His work easily divides itself into three neat sections; the sea journey from Calcutta to London (Chapters 1-8), his actual stay in England (Chapters 9-22) and his return journey to India via France, Italy, Turkey and Baghdad (Chapters 23-36).

Of all the places he visited, it was apparently England that became the principle object of Abu Taleb's intellectual curiosity, and claimed the largest share of his judgement, too. No wonder, he devoted so much of space to his commentary on the mechanical devices of the British, their constitution, law and order machinery, local and national forms of governance, financial management and tax structure et al. Buttressed with rare insights, these sections could be said to possess great archival, anthropological value, too.

Though at first sight Abu Taleb might appear to be quite awe-struck by the English, the picture he ultimately portrays is not one of unqualified idealization. When he does sit down to analyse or reflect on the British character, conduct and morals, he not only sees it, warts and all, but also describes it in his inimitable, no-holds-barred fashion.

If he's eager to praise the English people for their law-abiding, disciplined nature, he's equally impatient to denounce their absolute 'want of chastity' and 'licentiousness.' It's another matter that the prurient ways of the English begin to appear almost puritanical, once he learns that "all Italian women of fashion, have two husbands, between whom they equally divide their time" (p. 201). Though Abu's initial impression of Italy is not a very flattering one (owing to a rigorous health check he was subjected to on his arrival in the Bay of Genoa), he doesn't allow it to mar or influence his genuine appreciation of Italian music. One night, while listening to a charming melody in Genoa, he just stops short of falling out of the window, and declares, "the Indian, Persian and Western music bears the same comparison to the Italian that a mill does to a fine-toned organ" (p. 201).

Abu Taleb found himself in Europe at a time when it was going through a major political upheaval. French Revolution had already inaugurated a new phase of Republicanism in France, and the English were faced with a dual challenge. On the one hand, they were trying rather hard to absorb the aftershocks of the Industrial Revolution, and on the other, desperately struggling to suppress an immediate need for social and political reforms it had in any case created. Abu Taleb remains unflappable through it all, offering us the benefit of his wise, judicious comments and middle-of-the-road assessments.

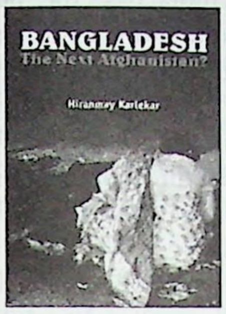
It is interesting how the narrative of Abu Taleb's *Travels* moves apace with the situations, events and circumstances he's often surrounded by. The first and the last sections dealing with the "journey," understandably, move at a much faster pace and show a much greater momentum than the ones which dwell upon the author's adventures and misadventures in the English society. Once he's ensconced in the company of his friends in London, his narrative, too, slows down considerably, becomes less speculative and more reflective, acquiring in the process a definite laid-back, leisurely, even luxurious quality. That explains why the 'beginning' and the 'ending' occasionally become tardily long catalogues of names, persons, places or things. In these sections, if there is anything that impresses, it's the accuracy of information and penchant for detail, which devolves right down to "the circumference of the port" and its distance in "nautical miles."

Among other things, one of the pleasures of reading a travelogue is to discover an entirely new world, complete with its compelling logic of the bizarre and the fantastic. However, in this particular account, if one is looking for some such element, a la Jonathan Swift, one is likely to be sorely disappointed. For Abu Taleb's imagination is so firmly tethered to hard-core reality that it misses out on out-of-the-ordinary experiences, almost completely. The only time Abu gets wide-eyed with astonishment is when he comes across a thirty-year old Irish woman in Cork, "who had been the mother of twenty-one children, eighteen of whom were then living" (p. 37). Often he approaches his material with the hawk-eyed sharpness of a trained historian, sifting his details carefully, pondering over his observations longingly, so that his account becomes both authentic and convincing. Only rarely does he drop the mask of a critical thinker as it happens when he talks about "selling his slaves," about whom he never bothers to explain how and under what circumstances they were acquired in the first place. But so rare are such slip-ups in Abu Taleb's account that they become almost negligible.

All in all, it is an extremely informative, well-structured and well-modulated travel document, and its significance lies in the way in which it becomes both a social history and an ethnographic material at the same time. Despite his attempt to use the first person narrator, Abu Taleb's narrative possesses a rare sense of detachment and objectivity. And this is where the real strength of his work also lies. Professor Mushirul Hasan deserves unreserved kudos for his efforts to resurrect this significant work.■

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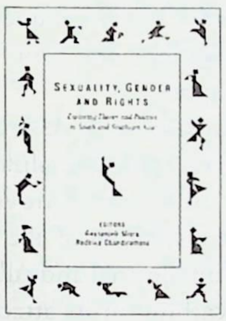
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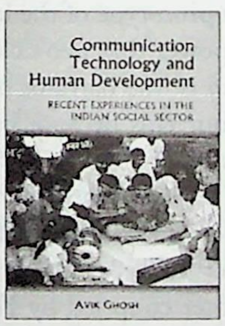
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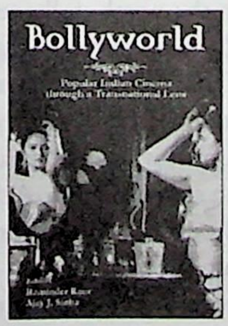
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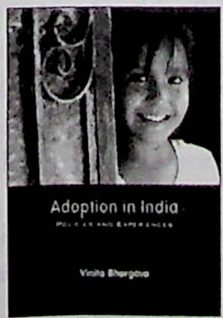
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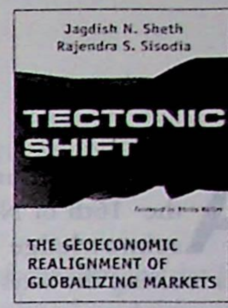
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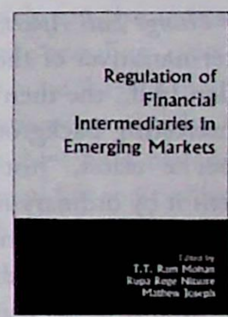
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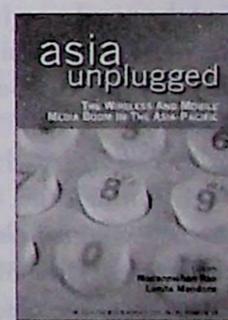
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Chinua Achebe

Mala Pandurang

Albert Chinualumogu Achebe turned seventy-five years old on the 16th of November 2005. This perhaps a fitting moment to acknowledge the contribution of this veteran writer in revolutionizing the ways in which world literature has been both read and taught over the past five decades. One of the most important living African literary artists, Achebe captured the imagination of a newly emerging decolonized world with the publication of his first novel *Things Fall Apart* in 1958. Indeed, each of Achebe's subsequent creative and critical works marks a significant moment in the trajectory of African literature in English, and also the larger body of postcolonial writing and theory.

Chinua Achebe was born in the village of Ogidi in Eastern Nigeria in 1930. His parents were missionary teachers. He joined the University College at Ibadan in 1948 and subsequently switched his field of study of medicine to that of literature. In 1952, he first read Joyce Cary's much-praised *Mister Johnson* (1939). Angered by Cary's racist-colonialist representation of the African, and Africa, a determined Achebe set out to write his first novel *Things Fall Apart,* recognized today as one of the most significant counter-narratives of the twentieth century.

Alan Hill, the then educational books director of Heinemann, recalls the interesting background to the publication of this remarkable book. Achebe, he relates, "just parceled the one handwritten copy in brown paper and sent it by ordinary mail to London, in response to an advertisement in *The Spectator:* 'Author's manuscripts typed'." A year later, he received a typed copy. Shortly afterwards Achebe was in London for a course at the BBC and showed it to his course officer, who then sent it to Heinemann. After initial hesitation, Heinemann published an initial run of just 2000 copies of the novel on June 17th 1958 (cited in Peterson and Rutherford). To date, there have been sales in excess of eight million copies worldwide and this remarkable book has been translated into fifty-five different languages.

Things Fall Apart chronicles the history of Igboland between 1875 and 1904, through the tragic inability of protagonist Okonkwo to deal with the new colonial dispensation. Achebe consciously set out to contest imperial stereotypes of Africa in *Things Fall Apart* and successfully compelled an acknowledgment of the existence of other non-Eurocentric 'cultures' and 'histories' as against the western master narrative.

Most African novelists who were writing in English in the 1950s and 1960s found themselves in a double-bind situation. As products of a colonial system of mission education in English, they had to re-assert their own unique African sensibility in a borrowed tongue. Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* inspired an entire generation of African novelists to appropriate the English language by incorporating techniques of oral story telling for a political purpose. Achebe demonstrated his masterly ability to Africanize the English language through the introduction of Igbo words and proverbs into the flow of the narrative. He thus appropriated the English language as a counter-weapon to perform a psychologically affirmative function and to inscribe new meanings.

In the brilliant and ironic ending of *Things Fall Apart* is the crux of the politics of representation, central to postcolonial debates on identity. The reader is witness to an act wherein the indigenous oral account of Okonkwo will be usurped by the written 'official account' of the white District Officer for his intended book on the *Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger.* The District Officer thus emerges, as Jeyifo points out, "a figure not merely of political, administrative power but also of narrative, discursive, epistemic authority" (p. 55).

Several of the seminal issues introduced in *Things Fall Apart* recur in Achebe's later works of four novels, collections of short stories and of poetry, children's fiction, and incisive critical and political commentaries. These include: the colonial encounter and the fragmentation of the Igbo community; the loss of its self-regulatory power and moral base; the politics of identity and the problematics of representation; and the question of leadership, responsibility and consequences of the growing schism between the political elite and the community.

Achebe became the commissioning editor of Heinemann's *African Writers Series* in 1960. He used this opportunity to shape the direction of modern African writing in English, and was responsible for the 'discovery' of new writers like Ngugi wa Thiong'o (then James Ngugi).

In 1964, Achebe published *Arrow of God* which focuses on the socio-historical-political engagement between the priest of Ulu (Ezeulu), the villages of Umuaro, and the new colonial administration, and particularly explores the relationship between religion and the social order. *Longer at Ease* (1960) is the third novel in the chronology, though published two years prior to *Arrow of God.* Set in the 1950s, the narrative marks the end of the colonial rule in Nigeria, and describes a society on the eve of self-rule. Obi Okonkwo, the grandson of the protagonist of *Things Fall Apart,* returns home from England, and finds himself caught between the older 'traditional' and the new 'modern' value systems. Obi's predicament mirrors the ambivalence experienced by young university graduates, once removed from their traditional locales and yet indebted to their communities for the opportunity for higher education. *No Longer at Ease* also explicates how western capitalism and consumerism has already set the framework for cultural paralysis in post-independence African society, and Obi soon succumbs to the rapidly prevailing culture of corruption.

As early as 1966, with the publication of his fourth novel *A Man of the People,* Achebe forewarns of the peculiar situation of neo-colonialization. Emmanuel Ngara describes the book as "the first major novel of disillusionment" (p.114). The novel offers a severe critique of the neo-elite/political class and the serious consequences of intellectual and cultural dependency. *A Man of the People* is particularly scathing in its attack on corrupt and irresponsible leadership. The political figure of Chief , the Honourable Dr Micah A Nanga M.P., L.L.D., is a prototype of the leader who compromises idealism for the privileges of power that neo-colonial politics offered. Young idealistic Odili Samulu, who is the narrator of the novel, challenges Nanga for a seat in Parliament but fails because he is alienated from the traditions of the people, and is out of touch with the common man. Coincidentally, *A Man of the People* was published just nine days after the 1966 military coup wherein a group of Igbo military officers led by Major General John T.Y Aguiyu-Ironsi took charge.

The 1966 coup was soon followed by a counter coup led by Hausa officers that established Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowan as Head of State. The killing of Ironsi and massacres of Igbo in the north, followed by a series of ethnic and political conflicts, led to a declaration of the secession of the eastern region from the rest of Nigeria. The Biafra civil war of 1967-70 followed. Achebe left Nigeria for the United States for four years and is said to have acted as the unofficial Biafran fund-raising ambassador. In 1970, Biafra surrendered and rejoined the Nigerian state. In 1976, Achebe returned as Professor at the University of Nsukka, though he still continued to spend time lecturing in universities in the United States.

Although Achebe did not produce another long work of fiction for almost twenty years, he wrote poetry, short stories, and lectured intensively. The context for Achebe's collection of poems in *Beware Soul Brother* (1971) is the trauma of the war years. *Girls at War* (1972) is a compilation of stories written between 1952 and 1971. Achebe also contributed four books to African Children's literature – *Chike and the River* (1966), *How Leopard got his Claws* (1972*), The Flute* (1977) and *The Drum* (1977). The latter three books are animal tales " in which Achebe recreates traditional tales and myths giving them new meanings to suit modern events and situations" (Emenyonu 1998). Achebe also put together a collection of incisive essays

on issues such as the language debate, appropriate critical standards, the aesthetic and functionalist concept of art , and the social responsibility of the writer in *Morning Yet on Creation Day. Essays (1975)* and *Hopes and Impediments. Selected Essays, 1965-87* (1988).

The scathing attack on graft in high places sets the tone for Achebe's fifth novel *Anthills of the Savannah*, published in 1987, almost twenty years after *A Man of the People*. Short-listed for the Booker prize, the novel received critical attention for its skilful combination of sophisticated literary devices and oral narrative traditions. Achebe once again displays his supremacy in the use of proverbs and storytelling techniques. The novel's complex plot deals with a coup in the imaginary state of the Republic of Kangan, closely identifiable with Nigeria of the 1980s. While the novel is a critique of the functioning of the modern African nation state, and the failure of the democratic model, it also touches upon issues of sub-nationalism such as tribalism and ethnic politics. Achebe makes a conscious attempt to address the alienation of the elite from the masses, and he is also more attuned to issues of gender.

Over the last two decades, the failure of political promises, debt traps, and ethnic clashes have compelled the African writer to assert the responsibilities of the artist. Creative writers who have taken this role seriously have paid the price for their outspoken criticism against authoritarian governments. On his part, Achebe has reasserted on a number of occasions his firm belief that political rhetoric is not enough. Reform will come about only if there is change at the level of the individual's consciousness and the duty of the writer is to not to give answers but to pose the appropriate questions.

In 1990 Achebe was fatally injured in a car accident on his way to Lagos, and was paralysed from his waist down. The 1990s also witnessed a spate of books and tributes to the veteran writer, which included three fascinating biographies (Ezenwa-Ohaeto 1997, Sallah 2003, and Phanuel Akubueze Egejuru, 2003), as well as an encyclopedia devoted to the writer (Booker, 2003). Achebe has not written another longer novel after *Anthills*, but has been active in the arena of non-fiction. He dissects the West's commonly held stereotypes of Africa in *Another Africa* (1998). The text of three lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1998 have been published in *Home and Exile* (2000) wherein Achebe offers his views on the current trend of 'fashionable cosmopolitanism', and expresses his unhappiness at the privileging of the exile motif by writers like Salman Rushdie. Achebe has also issued a revised collection of his earlier poetry with a few additions in *Collected Poems* (2004). His forthcoming publication *Africa: A Short History* is eagerly awaited. He currently holds a teaching position at Bard College, New York State.

Chinua Achebe continues to be the most often taught African writer in India, and in universities worldwide. Indeed, Achebe's entire oeuvre, and his incredible literary career which has been a journey of not just personal, but of collective self-discovery.■

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Mala Pandurang is currently a Fulbright Visiting Faculty at the University of Texas at Austin. Her most recent project is a collection of critical essays, *Chinua Achebe: New Critical Orientations Series* (ed) (Forthcoming. Pencraft International, Delhi).

Gazing the Linguistic Crystal Ball

Murari Prasad

THE LANGUAGE REVOLUTION
By David Crystal
Polity Press,Cambridge, 2004, First Indian Reprint 2005, pp.142, Rs. 195.00

This slim volume is a significant expression of concern for the future of minority languages and the attendant cultural casualties in the age of electronic communication. The author, who is one of the foremost authorities on the English language today, also watches the direction and profile of English as a global language, or an international *lingua franca*, and predicts the possible scenario in the event of the likely marginalization of native English speakers by an overhelming number of the language's non-native users. The key language theme for the 21st century, in his view, is the preservation of language ecology.

The three chapters of the book summarize his arguments advanced earlier in his three books: *English as a Global Language*(1997), *Language Death* (2000) and *Language and the Internet* (2001), with some modifications; in the remaining two chapters he views the linguistic world further "by standing on the shoulders" of these books. A quick run-through of the language trends outlined in the three chapters is quite revealing, even more so the author's less sanguine, and more circumspect, tone. Crystal maintains that for the first time in history the world is witnessing a truly global language. Before the rise of English to this status in the 1990s, no language could permeate so many important domains of human life and civilization. Not that English has any special qualities to contribute to its success or it is intrinsically lovable, but it has had the good fortune to experience favourable circumstances during the last five hundred years or so. Its growth has been essentially fuelled by four factors, political (euphemism for colonial), technological, economic and cultural.

What does Crystal mean by a global language? It is not that everyone around the world has started speaking English. The number of mother-tongue speakers of English (372 million) is still far fewer than that of Chinese (1,113 million). Spanish, Arabic and Hindi are not far behind English. As regards the number of countries with a dominant mother tongue, Arabic heads the list. And probably Spanish is also ahead of English. Crystal's point that "no language has ever been spoken by a mother-tongue majority in more than a dozen or so countries "(p.7) is debatable, in that Arabic is spoken as a mother tongue in over 20 countries. But these figures do not go far enough to determine the global role of a language. It is the official and institutional presence of a language along with a special role given to it that decides its primacy over other tongues. English has gained that position by virtue of being the second language in over 70 of the 191 UN member nations, the chief foreign language in more than 100 countries and the preponderant forum for politics, trade, technology and higher education, and it has no challenger—at least yet. Although Crystal's calculation of 1,400 million for the total number of English users in the world—roughly a quarter of the global population—has been seen with "tenuous grounding in reality" by some writers on the subject, the widespread use of English cannot be doubted.

But this amazing growth has a downside too. The demographic balance is no longer in favour of the mother-tongue speakers of English. In other words, the number of non-native speakers of English has already exceeded the number of native speakers, and the trend is on the increase. Statistically speaking, the second/foreign language users of English are in the range of 1000 million whereas the native speakers total not more than 400 million. What are the implications of this growing gap? To quote Crystal, "… [I]t is just as likely that the future course of English is going to be influenced by

However, the character of English has certainly changed. So have the owners and proprietors of the language. Not because English has borrowed words from 350 languages and become in the process "a vacuum cleaner of a language" or, as Dorothy Thompson describes it, a "glorious and imperial mongrel". It is simply because those who have learned it have now rights in it.

those who speak it as a second or foreign language as by those who speak it as a mother-tongue" (p.23). For instance, *welcome in Egypt*—a common local usage in that country—is now being seen in English textbooks there. Likewise, Yemen is among the earliest users of the word *multi-dippers* (used to refer to ghost civil servants or those who collect more than one salary) in 2005, and so this lexical item will soon find its way in new dictionaries. Clearly, Egypt and Yemen do not have pervasive presence of English like India, Malaysia, Singapore and Nigeria where new 'Englishes' have plainly emerged with a substantial body of literature.

Will the variety of 'Englishes' fragment the language? Crystal does not think so. Standard English and the local 'Englishes' are like two parallel tracks—two railway lines—the users of the latter keep coming back to the core language in international communication even as they use dynamic varieties of English with new words, sentences, grammar, rhythms and rhetoric in their local context. Crystal does not privilege standard varieties of English. Not more than 2 per cent of the English-language community, including the native speakers, speaks standard English, as Crystal said recently in the pages of *Biblio* (January-February 2005, pp.10-12), nonetheless the contact between emigrant 'Englishes' and the internationally used standard variety is sustained by the enormously improved communication facilities. Crystal draws geopolitical parallels between current English and classical Latin, like the "Latin Analogy" in Tom McArthur's *The English Languages* (1998) , but holds the view that " the history of Latin is no guide to the future of English" (p.37). The regional varieties of Latin, or Vulgar Latin, spoken in Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, Romania and elsewhere increasingly diverged from Standard Latin as well as from one another, and eventually emerged into separate tongues by c.900. From a potential world *lingua franca* to a dead language, in a manner of speaking, is Latin's linguistic profile. In total contrast, English has grown from 4-5 million speakers around the time Shakespeare moved from Stratford, Warwickshire to London to 1.5 billion in Bill Gates's Microsoft empire. Also, the earliest words flowing into the language from outside the British Isles—Jamestown, Virginia in North America— such as *raccoon* (1608) and *totem* (1609), to *multi-dippers* (2005) from Yemen are part of the same linguistic continuum.

Crystal is quite right. The predictions of divergence and eventual separation between English and the American tongue made by Noah Webster (*Dissertations on the English Language*, 1789) and Mark Twain (*The Stolen White Elephant*, 1882), among many others in America, and a century later, in 1877, by the British philologist Henry Sweet (the probable model for G.B. Shaw's Henry Higgins in *Pygmalion/ My Fair Lady*) have proved wrong. Although cases of communication failure and remedies for that have been suggested by Marko Modiano ('The Americanization of Euro-English', in *World Englishes*, vol.15, No.2, 1996), the concept of 'Mid-Atlantic' variety towards harmonizing American English and British English is still a non-starter.

However, the character of English has certainly changed. So have the owners and proprietors of the language. Not because English has borrowed words from 350 languages and become in the process "a vacuum cleaner of a language" or, as Dorothy Thompson describes it, a "glorious and imperial mongrel". It is simply because those who have learned it have now rights in it. So, in the coming years which country is going to be in charge of the language trends in English? Certainly not Britain with 4 per cent of the global English-speaking population. Not even America now with about 15 per cent of the world total. Here is Crystal cautiously suggesting the country's name: "In India, there are *probably* [emphasis mine] now more speakers of English than in the whole of Britain and the USA combined" (p.24). In a later comment on the linguistic scene, Crystal drops the disclaimer adverbial, and declares: "India currently has a special place in the English language record books—as the country with the largest English-speaking population in the world. Ten years ago that record was held by the US. Not any more" (*The Guardian*, November 19, 2004). What does this share in the future of English signify? It is difficult to predict as yet, but when International Standard English becomes a global reality, it will not be recognizably British, American or anything else. To be sure, Crystal is not going so far as to say, as Jennifer Jenkins does in her book *The Phonology of English as an International Language* (2000), that the native speakers will need to be taught the ' Lingua Franca Core' (LFC) of International English, but he is certainly suggesting that RP (Received Pronunciation) and GA (General American) are no longer the standards against which non-native speakers' proficiency is to be judged.

The second dimension to the language revolution is the increasing impact of English on its contact languages. The influx of English loan words into other languages is irresistible. Some languages like French have adopted a purist attitude. Crystal has no sympathy with the anti-borrowing position. The cultures which try to fence themselves off from such influences get cut off from rich creative possibilities. English would not have had the kind of lexical richness it has today had it not borrowed from other languages. It has grown by adopting and adapting words from other languages. From a Germanic language by origin it has come a long way today with four-fifths of its vocabulary from French, Latin, Greek and other sources, and the borrowings have empowered the language in no small measure.

The second impact of a global language is pretty alarming, and clearly Crystal is carrying a torch for the endangered languages. There are over six and a half thousand languages (6,703 to be exact, according to the 1996 edition of *Ethnalogue* survey) in the world. Over half of them will die out in the next century. Although English is global in reach, it is not the sole cause for the demise of weaker languages. In Crystal's view, Spanish, Portuguese, Russian, Chinese and Arabic, too, have steamrollered many languages. He further calculates that only 4 per cent of the globe's 6 billion people speak 96 per cent of the language and 25 per cent of the languages have fewer than 1000 speakers. Notable among the dying languages is Aramaic, the language used by Jesus and his disciples. A few years ago, when Pope John Paul II arrived in the Middle East to retrace Christ's footsteps and addressed Christians, Muslims and Jews, the Pontiff spoke not Latin, not Arabic, not Hebrew, not his native Polish. He spoke in English.

Among the reasons set out by Crystal for the death of languages are natural disasters, cultural assimilation and homogenization, displacement or decimation of indigenous communities, and socio-economic pressures. It seems he is looking for universal theories of why languages die but, as with the extinction of species, there are contingent factors too. Nonetheless, his 'red alert' and alarming projections about the languages under siege underline the priority of the issue. Besides official patronage and media support for aboriginal and dying languages,'semilingualism'—multilingualism with restricted competence—is the need of the hour as "children are born not just with a LAD (Language Acquisition Device), as Chomsky argued, but with a MAD (Multilingual Acquisition Device)".

The third dimension to language revolution appeared with the "public acquisition of the Internet" in the 90s. Computer-mediated communication or electronic communication, or *netspeak*, as Crystal prefers the term, is the third medium of communication after the evolution of speech and the emergence of writing. It is a new species of interaction. Not a purist in the matters of language policy (it bears repeating), he advocates acceptance of linguistic inter-mixing and net-inspired mutations, even mangled expressions. He does not believe that casualness in the use of language by the *netizens* (users of the net) with radical graphological deviance will affect the hygiene of languages and lead to linguistic anarchy. In fact, *netspeak* is

extending the stylistic range of English. It is deviant, but not a dumbed-down language. Once its possibilities stabilize, the advantages of the futuristic communicative technology will be appreciated better.

As a disparate set of communications consisting of domains such as e-mail, chatgroups and www (World Wide Web) pages, the internet revolution is a linguistic one. It has generated changes in the fabric of the English language and offered a wonderful port of call for information enquiries. With a range of *smileys* and *emoticons* – "combination of key-board characters designed to show an emotional facial expression"—for example, :-([Unhappy], :-c [really unhappy], :-C[unbelieving], *netspeak* can carry the burden of speech to some extent, but it certainly lacks the drama of face-to-face personal exchange. It is not traditional writing either. It is "written language which has been pulled some way in the direction of speech than as spoken language which has been written down" (p.79). At any rate, it is a "genuine 'new medium'".

Crystal is not optimistic about the English-speaking users of the Web remaining as the largest online language community. The Internet was a purely English-language medium when it started, but it will soon cease to be so. With over 1500 languages going online, the Net postings in English are now down to about 55 per cent (from 80 per cent, as quoted by A.I.C. Monaghan in 1998 in " Web English—the Future?"[*Links & Letters*, 5, 1998, pp183-192]) —much lower than the figure Crystal gave in his book *English as a Global Language*. He rather comes around to David Graddol's position in *The Future of English* (British Council, 1997), although he does not notice any immediate threat to English's premier status as a world language. His position seems tenable mainly because, as Tom McArthur observed recently, "the centre of gravity of English as a second language or lingua franca is manifestly Asian (especially in the South and East)" (*English Today* 74, April 2003, p.22). Notwithstanding the sanguine view of English's future, there are cautious claims for Chinese (Halliday, *English Today* 69, January 2002,p.11) and Spanish (Jane Stevenson in his review of Nicholas Ostler's *Empires of the World: a Language History of the World* in *The Observer*, March 13,2005) as the likely candidates for a global language in the future.

Finally, Crystal raises the foremost issue of enlisting the Web-generated resources to revitalize the endangered languages by encouraging their cultural underpinnings. In 1999, UNESCO created 21 February as International Mother Language Day; 2001 was designated the European Year of Languages, and in the same year 26 September was established as an annual World Language Day. These landmark initiatives to promote plurilingual culture need to be given further boost in the coming years. Alert language conscience along with greater interdependence between language and literature is Crystal's call for the future of language in our electronic age.

An important point which Crystal misses out in his discourse on the 'vanishing voices' is that the single most important means for saving indigenous languages is education through the medium of the mother tongue. For instance, in Ireland, the minority language Irish has been supported by a national education policy which favours Irish as the language of instruction. The status of Irish on par with English has resulted in an increase in the use of Irish, despite the pervasive British and American cultural influence around the country.

Suggestions such as adapting net-inspired styles for new linguistic energies will, I feel, have wide support. His call for promoting linguistic diversity with a new linguistic mindset may be of interest to a wide audience. Whether the consequences of his call will be as Crystal hopes remains to be seen. However, his insight into the current linguistic climate is valuable, his comment on the revolutionary changes informative and thorough, and his argument characteristically clear.■

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Of Madhavis among the Middle Class

B. Mangalam

I AM MADHABI
By Suchitra Bhattacharya. Translated from the Bangla by Jadu Saha
Katha, Delhi, 2005, pp. 195, Rs. 200.00

Madhavi, the daughter of Yayati has intrigued writers over the decades. There have been novels, plays, short stories in many Indian languages focussing on her fate. The tale of Yayati's gifting away of his daughter to Galav who asks her to bed three kings and his Guru so that he may fulfil his vow to offer appropriate Guru dakshina has, time and again, provoked debates over issues of female subjectivity, patriarchal control over women's body, women's sexuality and their place in natal and marital domestic space. Literally forced to rent out her womb, commodifying her body to fulfil her husband's ambition, suppressing her maternal instincts, deserted at old age, recognizing her enforced dependence on father, brother, husband, son...Madhavi's life underlines a woman's subjugation irrespective of her class or caste. Suchitra Bhattacharya draws our attention to the fact that women are not allowed to carve out an independent identity in our society. Her Madhabi observes with dismay, "A princess or whatever I might be, every fibre of my body knew that a woman could not have an independent identity" (p.94).

Bhattacharya in her story, 'I am Madhabi', lets Madhavi tell her tale herself but infuses her narration with wit and self-reflexivity. Madhavi's career and her realization in her middle age that there is possibly no alternative space available to her where she may inhabit without male control over her body and mind are interwoven with the tales of Anasuyas, Anurupas, Malas, Srabanis, Kalyanis, Shikhas, Dolons—women drawn from middle class contemporary Kolkata.

Bhattacharya's stories are powerful narratives which subject to a ruthless scrutiny middle class moral dilemmas, its deceptions, its dual standard, its corruptibility, its pathetic dependence on a fast disintegrating familial structure, its quotidian struggles and its industrious accumulation of material securities while refusing to admit to its inner, spiritual vacuum. Each of the thirteen stories in this collection engages the reader with its effortless but powerfully moving narrative of the pains and insecurities of middle class men and women who carry on their responsibilities within the family even while struggling to come to terms with its changed contours. The loneliness of the aged Sukhamoy and Anurupa, clinging on to their well-earned material comforts even while desperate to hear from their NRI sons in 'Attachment', the sudden jolt to businessman Samarendra's complacency by his aged wife's attempt at suicide in 'Postmortem', the adulterous lives of Dhiman in the 'Sea before him' or of Shyamalendu in 'After the Suicide', the tightrope walk practised by Subhamoy and Nila over inculcating moral values among one's adolescent children and one's corrupt strategies to make quick money at work in 'White powder, red colour' are handled deftly. Bhattacharya retains empathy even while subjecting her characters to a careful severity.

Neither raising the ethical bogey nor betraying indulgent sentimentalism, Bhattacharya manages to implicate the reader and the middle class at large and thereby suggest a need for self-interrogation.

Bhattacharya's stories are extremely readable. Even while making a serious inquiry into conduct, ethical concerns or gender equation, she never touches a polemical or discursive pitch. Her exposure of hypocrisy or avarice among the better empowered among the middle-class is tinged with humour while her depiction of complexities of marital relations is marked by an interplay of power relations. The writer's most significant accomplishment is her easy interweaving of a feminist perspective on middle class milieu without any overt, jargon loaded, academic discourse.

Jadu Saha's translation felicitates readability while conveying a specific cultural resonance. The only lapse in an otherwise well brought out production pertains to its disregard for publication details of these short stories in the original. That information would further enhance the reader's appreciation of social history of Kolkata as captured by Bhattacharya.■

B. Mangalam's research pertains to dalit fiction in Tamil.

Interrogating Social Biases

Radha Chakravarty

STAGING RESISTANCE: PLAYS BY WOMEN IN TRANSLATION
Edited by Tutun Mukherjee
Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2005, pp. 552, Rs. 595.00

While fiction, autobiography and poetry by Indian women have received considerable critical attention in recent years, women's drama has remained a relatively neglected area. *Staging Resistance* seeks to redress this lacuna, foregrounding the contribution of women playwrights to the development of a subversive "womanist dramaturgy" in India. Consisting of eighteen short plays in ten different languages, this anthology seeks to demonstrate the versatility of the selected dramatists, as well as their shared preoccupations. The accent, as the title suggests, is on resistance and interrogation of social biases against women; but there is also an attempt to highlight technical innovation and formal experiment.

The useful introduction by editor Tutun Mukherjee outlines broad trends within contemporary Indian theatre, and women's place within this discourse. In addition, each linguistic-literary segment has a separate preface that places the women writers in question within the theatrical traditions of their own respective languages. Implicit within such a structure is a recognition of the heterogeneity of forms within the broader category of "Indian drama," precluding facile generalizations.

As Tutun Mukherjee declares in her Introduction, womanist drama occupies an interstitial location between realism and non-realism. In particular, Mukherjee highlights the usefulness of the Brechtian model for the development of an alternative theatre, seeking, not catharsis or equipoise through a tacit endorsement of the status quo in a patriarchal society, but "to roil the equilibrium, to disturb the mind, to resist closure, and deny a therapeutic purging of the mind."

In spite of the diversity of contexts, the plays in this collection reveal a shared preoccupation with certain issues: discrimination against women, denial of voice and agency, the identification of women with the roles of mothers and wives, and their objectification as targets of male desire. Together, the plays interrogate some of these assumptions, but also testify to the spirit of rebellion that continues to motivate women even in situations of extreme oppression.

A sense of history, a desire to retrieve the long narrative of women's oppression, animates some of these plays. Ambai's 'Crossing the River', Tripurari Sharma's 'A Tale from the Year 1857: Azizun Nisa' and Usha Ganguli's 'The Journey Within' chart this alternative history in different ways, but also affirm women's determination to chase their dreams in the face of all opposition. The attempt to review the past from a female perspective often involves a retelling of stories derived from myth and folklore.

Most of the plays in this collection engage with the ways in which gender intersects with other modes of oppression to create multiple levels of marginalization for women belonging to different social categories. 'Listen, Shefali', for instance, addresses the issue of dalit women and their exploitation. In a schematized manner, Catherine Thankamma's 'Beyond Facades' demonstrates how discrimination based on caste, creed and community may be related to questions of gender.

In tackling their difficult subject matter, several of the playwrights take recourse to non-realistic modes of representation, and break generic boundaries. Mangai's 'Frozen Fire', when performed in Tamil by Usha

Although *Staging Resistance* presents drama as literary text, the editor reminds us also of the importance of the performative aspect: "Theatre that matters must be theatre in interaction with society." Such interactions, of course, remain beyond the scope of the written page; the present volume can only act as a pointer to the work that still remains to be done in this relatively unexplored area of enquiry.

Rani, presented the actor in koothu male costume, which she removed in the course of the narration, to appear as Ambaa and then as a flowing river. The play thus calls for a modern redeployment of traditional Tamil theatre, music and costume; the translation attempts to preserve the style of the original, leaving the director/performer to evolve suitable strategies for enactment. 'Listen Shefali' makes special use of sets and lighting to make its statement about social discrimination. Although most of the plays are written in prose, several use a combination of prose, verse and song, and more than one play is written entirely in verse. The tone of most of these plays is dark and often bitter, but there are occasional instances of farce and comic satire, as in Swarnakumari Devi's 'The Wedding Tangle'.

As a collection of translations by diverse hands, 'Staging Resistance' suffers from the usual problems: the quality of translation tends to be uneven, sometimes veering towards extreme awkwardness where the translator attempts literal fidelity to the nuances of the original. Not all cultural nuances translate smoothly into English; this is not necessarily a flaw in the text, for these moments of awkwardness remind us of the "translatedness" of these plays, underscoring the cultural differences that remain an irreducible feature of Indian writing.

An inspiring intervention in the field of Women's Studies, this collection is not without its areas of weakness. Some languages are over-represented, while many others are not included at all. Whether these exclusions are inadvertent, or dictated by non-availability of material in English translation, or whether they imply an absence of women's drama in certain parts of India, the Introduction does not clarify. It is worth considering, too, whether the plays are self-consciously "womanist," or whether they have been assigned the label by the theoretical frame that Mukherjee seeks to construct. The theoretical insights, predictably, are drawn primarily from "western" paradigms (barring a few token references to *rasa* theory and Indian dramaturgy), while the plays themselves retain a strong flavour of their regional cultural ethos. These anomalies are indications, perhaps, of the hybrid literary soil from which the notion of an Indian "womanist drama" has sprung.

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Chiefly About Indian Fiction, 2004-2005

Shobhana Bhattacharji

Penguin India published more fiction in 2004-2005 than earlier: original/reissued/anthologized/long/short/translated/Indian/subcontinental/multicultural/memoir-like fiction, stories about cities. Judging by what HarperCollins, Macmillan, Roli Books, Sahitya Akademi, and Zubaan generously provided for this article, so did others. The writing is new in its use of language. The dullest is in the tediously parenthetical older style: "National Cadet Corps (NCC)" (K.P.Singh, The Road to Raisina), and only the dreariest writers create Indian flavoured English. (Boman Desai's Indians in A Woman Madly in Love begin every sentence with "Arre".) Indian English used to be the matter as well as the vehicle of novels, a style that lingers in Rupa Gulab's Girl Alone, which works with short sentences and limited vocabulary. She writes independent, middle class working women looking for husbands but contemplate spinsterhood. Since Girl Alone is in Penguin's Shobhaa Dé collection, it ends in marriage. Swati Kaushal's Piece of Cake is the same insistently bright style.

The newer way is to use English to tell a story rather than make it the object of attention, which has brought some older writers into fashion. Nergis Dalal, who's been writing for fifty years, used it in The Girls From Overseas (1979, reissued in 2005). Despite its ungrammatrical title, Minakshi Chowdhry employs it in Ghost Stories of Shimla Hills, endorsed by Ruskin Bond, himself an exponent of it, as is Tom Alter (*The Longest Race*, about a pahari marathon runner). Others are Saad Ashraf, *The Postmaster*; Ramabai Espinte, *The Swinging Bridge*, about the West Indies and Montreal; Shonali Bose, *Amu*, the story of her film, culminating in the 1984 anti-Sikh riots; Kaveri Nambisan, *The Hills of Angheri*; and—a translation—Vinod Kumar Shukla's *A Window Lived in the Wall*, in which newly married Sonsi learns that her husband doesn't always come home on an elephant. Older writers like Krishen Khanna (*The Time of My Life*) use English with easy wit. Gautam Bhatia's *Comic Century: An Unreliable History of the Twentieth Century* harks back to Richard Armour and Spike Milligan, heroes of English medium undergraduates in the 1960s and 1970s who didn't need to be told that these were comic and unreliable histories. But having rid our school syllabi of irony and allusion, jokes have to be explained. The rest of the book, however, assumes that readers know what's what and is quite funny.

The worst writers bristle with clichés of event and language. In Tanushree Poddar's *Nurjahan's Daughter*, the protagonist becomes a fashion designer for Mughal women! The usual anecdotes—e.g., Nurjahan's shooting the dhobi—are told at length without insight or information as there is in Kunal Basu's *The Minitiaturist*, which shows Akbar's times through the eyes of a talented young painter. Other historical novels are Aruna Chakravarti's *The Inheritors*, about a Bengali Vaidic Brahmin family, from 1897 to 2000; A.Madhaviah's *Clarinda*, about the widow of a Maratha Brahmin in the mid-18th century, who became the concubine of one Lyttleton (Lyttelton?), an English soldier; Rebecca Ryman's *The Veil of Illusion*, set in 1871 India, another inter-community romance; and Frank Rogers' *When the Fight was Done: A Novel of the Maratha Wars*, in which Lakshmi, married to the Maharaja of Satara, romances Captain Robert Mackenzie. *The Minitiaturist* manifests a new casual but informed interest in distaff history told in clear English whereas Poddar's novel opens with a woman in labour whose "groans tattooed the walls with agony." Poddar cannot visualize her images, unlike Shinie Antony in whose wonderful *Kardamom Kisses*, the triplet baby aunts' "tentative, unused smile ... were... reversed and parked back in tiny dental garages." Reshma Ruia's *Something Black in the Lentil Soup* straddles two cultures, a rarer type than I thought. I had presumed that the new novels would be set in India and the West whereas they are mostly focused upon India alone. Ruia's has a fly in amber quality about it, evident in the literal translation of her title from Hindustani. She recreates India of the 1970s from an exilic memory, I think. Things have changed so much that I couldn't immediately place a Premier Padmini. Though better written than *Girl Alone*, I'd soon forgotten it. For wit, there's Chetan Bhagat's *One Night @ the Call Center* in which God calls up six people at a call centre, and Ravi Shankar Etteth's murder mystery, *The Village of Widows*. Siddhartha Deb's *Surface*, a topographically accurate political thriller, is set on the India-Burma border.

The best of the new fiction is emphatically post-1990s. Writers consider the ways in which the decade was a watershed for us. Many of them trace the slow, insidious, terrifying instability created between communities, friends; and within families — especially within families — by religious feelings, growing fundamentalism, and an absence of leaders to show the way out of the morass. There is no healing at the end, matched by the absence of closure in many of the novels. The best of them, Samina Ali's *Madras on Rainy Days*, Altaf Tyrewalla's *No God in Sight*, Cyrus Mistry's *The Radiance of Ashes*, and Manzoor Ahtesham's *A Dying Banyan*, place the individual within the family, community, nation, and world, the outermost causing the innermost to alter. This is the method of the finest novels ever written, and in that sense may not be new but the issues are new. Despite their winding down into despair, there is something like hope in them. The writers do not return to the sense of an India where we lived together in happiness in spite of belonging to different religions, a way of life that was displaced by the 1990s, but they see that life everywhere. Meher Pestonji's *Sadak Chaap* has Bombay slum children of all faiths faced with common problems trying to overcome them together. *The Radiance of Ashes* is a more ruthlessly told story of poverty and corruption in Bombay, exploding into communal rioting at the end, but the effect is not to create any kind of hatred. Rather, like its siblings, this novel too arouses compassion and a bewildered understanding. A possible classification for these novels is return to sanity or lest we forget fiction.

There is an inevitable harshness to this post-1990s fiction. "Leave Hindustan to the Hindus," says a man who does not wish to leave but feels he has no place in this India, a thought repeated in other novels. An astonishing number of new novels are from small communities, Parsis, Kerala Christians, Anglo-Indians, so that I half seriously thought of classifying them accordingly. After a bit, it didn't seem such a silly idea. There is much to explore here, but a couple of things seem evident. Almost all the novels describe the community from within rather than anthropologically listing its qualities but missing its emotional substance. There are unavoidable rituals, colours, and smells characteristic of the community – I thought the Hyderabadi wedding in *Rainy Days in Madras* would never end — but the intention is not to make it seem exotic. It is more in the nature of resisting homogenization, and showing the community as rich in relationships and ideas, with differences and tensions among its members when faced with violence or injustice. This is true even of Hugh and Colleen Gantzer's *The Year Before Sunset*, set in 1946, in which the British and Anglo-Indian communities worry about thier future once India is independent. It exists in the cracks of a unified national history.

The new novels must be read not one at a time but in great swathes for together they draw a picture of India we do not get from factual reports. In a recent lecture, Aijaz Ahmad said that in the social turmoil of the late nineteenth century, it was English prose that developed, not poetry or drama. So it is in India today, I think. Novels have the space for thinking through the consequences of events and of their effects upon individuals and their relationships. This is another new quality of this fiction. Altaf Tyrewalla, who acknowledges Conrad's influence, concludes *No God in Sight* with R.L.Stevenson's comment, "Everybody, sooner or later, sits down to a banquet of consequences." The few books about personal angst are in the comical *Girl Alone* mode or memoirs. The greater concern is with relationships, a shift that reflects our post-1990s concern about Indian as an entity. Few writers have developed relationships through conversation,

tending more towards debate like speeches reminiscent of the idea-laden dialogue of nineteenth-century British closet drama that was the despair of stage managers but has been a useful record of a society in politically turbulent times. These debate-like exchanges, in *A Dying Banyan*, for instance, involve one with something beyond ourselves whereas the conversations in lesser novels are like e-mails, which have replaced the life of imagination with daily trivia.

Some other categories

Coming of age stories. Those relentlessly concentrated upon one individual are difficult to read (e.g., Ardashir Vakil's *Beach Boy*). (Chetan Bhagat's *Five Point Someone: What Not To Do At IIT* is far livelier.) A close relative is the (usually NRI) memoir, like Saleem Peeradina's *The Ocean in My Yard*, which is similar to *Beach Boy*. They are emotional more than analytical. Being essentially about childish responses to situations, they lean towards sights, sounds and smells. Their structure is episodic rather than causal. It is too exhausting, or perhaps too old fashioned, for the writers to think of cause and effect; nor can they imagine the future logically. Like pulp romances, they tend to stop just before their protagonists begin to engage with life rather than with adolescent feelings and nostalgia for childhood. The memoir of 2004-2005 has been complicated for me by Vikram Seth's *Two Lives*, his truth-history-memoir, which I cannot wholly admire. Like many readers, I think the story of the cache of letters could have been better told. Oddly, discovering a cache of letters has been the central motif in novels around the world for quite some time. The most famous discovery in post-war history was of the Scrope Davies trunk, packed with letters and manuscripts by Byron and Shelley, lost since 1816. Now we have Seth's true story, and fictional discoveries in Tarun Tejpal's *Alchemy of Desire* and Dominique Varma's *Shifting Sands*. The cache of letters is as exciting as treasure maps in children's stories. The rapidly disappearing border between adult and children's fiction is another new area to be explored.

Then there are stories of migration. Orhan Pamuk says in *Istanbul: Memories of a City*, that some imaginations (Conrad, Nabokov, Naipaul) are fed by exile; their nourishment comes from rootlessness, which is and isn't an issue in contemporary Indian literature. "Creative" migrants, those who write about being migrants, are few, and well off. They describe their class and type, not the greater issue of migrations caused by war or poverty. Journalists and social scientists write about that voiceless lot of migrants. The fiction of migration seeks to create links between scattered communities through shared experiences. Memoirs and autobiographies accompany it to help readers know the stuff out of which writers make their fiction. Pamuk's *Istanbul* is in this style. Though he is himself not a migrant, his is another kind of literature of migration, namely, literature that travels around the world because it has been translated into English. Contemporary memoirs are different to the memoirs and autobiographies of the 1930s, that other great age of modern autobiography, which attempted to find a language and form for the experience of war, economic crashes, and the Depression. Ford Madox Ford had a single word — Armageddon — for World War I, whereas Robert Graves recreated the landscape of Armageddon in *Goodbye to All That*. The function of Pamuk's memoir is to draw readers into his world to create common ground for reading his novels.

Women's novels, a useful if mind-numbing description. Among my 80 or so books, there are more women writers than men, as there have been since the novel's inception. They continue to write about women's lives, but some things are now taken for granted. Women's suffering is placed at the periphery, often located in an older generation, not as being outdated but to suggest that the newer generation may be different. This is especially well done in *Kardamom Kisses* in which the violence to the protagonist's mother is barely described. For that very reason it haunts one with real pain. Another way is to stretch the imagination to deal with issues that have been often talked about but will not go away, to hint at domestic abuse, for instance, to suggest, not state (*The Merlion and the Hibiscus: Contemporary Short Stories from Singapore and Malaysia*). Some other women's novels are Usha Alexander's *Only the Eyes are Mine*, about a poor girl who learns to read and write, and emigrates to the US when she is middle aged; Sharmishtha Mohanty's *New Life*, a present tense evocation of a woman's inner life; Anita Nair's *Mistress*, also a present tense story about an adulterous affair between an American and the niece of a Kathakali dancer. Strangely, even though doctors, advertisers, retired teachers, and social workers, dot the novels, women seem to remain in the kitchen.

Short Stories

Stories translated from Urdu, Tamil, and Hindi; *The Penguin Book of Indian Railways Stories*, from Jules Verne to the present; George Phillipos's *The Men Inside*, a marine engineer's yarns based on his work and inspired by Joseph Conrad; Sandeep Goyal's *The Dum Dum Bullet*, anecdotes from an advertiser's life; *A Letter from India*, Pakistani short stories; Manjula Padmanabhan's *Kleptomania*; *City Improbable*, writings on Delhi; HarperCollins's *New Indian Fiction: Contemporary Writing in English*; Premendra Mitra's *Mosquito and Other Stories: Ghana-Da's Tall Tales*; Nisha Da Cunha's *The Quiet of the Birds: Collected Stories*; and Stephen Alter's splendid, *Aripan and Other Stories*. Beautifully structured, 'Aripan' weaves between reality and fiction as different readers see different things in the same story. His Indian stories linger without cloying nostalgia in small towns, forest rest houses, and missionary establishments. Rana Dasgupta's *Tokyo Cancelled* is an up-dated *Decameron*. Travellers stranded at Tokyo airport tell each other stories that echo folk tales. Another possible encompassing category for the new fiction: the return of the story.

War Zones

Paro Anand's *No Guns at My Son's Funeral*, about growing up amidst Kashmiri militancy, probably the first children's story in English of its kind. Temsula Ao's *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone* tells of people of the North East bewildered by violence, their notions of home, nation, nationality and identity.

The very few

Reprint: *Mulk Raj Anand: A Reader:* his fiction, essays, and an appraisal by E.M.Forster. Penguin Classic: Toru Dutt's *The Dairy of Mademoiselle D'Arvers*, possibly the first novel in French by an Indian. Poetry: Puran Singh's *The Knock at Midnight*: so poorly translated that one cannot really judge it. Literary criticism: *Refiguring Culture: History, Theory, and the Aesthetic in Contemporary India*, ed. Satish Poduval: a rigorous appraisal of English studies. Drama: Adya Rangacharya, *Listen Janamejaya and Other Plays*: 7 powerful plays translated by various people.■

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Lingering Memories

Eunice de Souza

TWO LIVES
By Vikram Seth
Penguin Viking India, 2005, pp. 503, Rs. 695.00

Aunt Henny was a very private person. Should he be making use of letters she had intended for the recipient only? But he does, because he feels they are historically important, and because they help to bring someone he loved to life. Certainly, there are sharp, unexpected reminders in the letters of the deprivation experienced by ordinary people: one letter expresses gratitude for shoelaces sent from England.

Perhaps the most pertinent question one can ask about a memoir is whether the author has made the person or period s/he wishes to evoke relevant to readers. In *Two Lives* the persons concerned are Vikram Seth's maternal granduncle Shanti and his German-Jewish wife Henny who met in Berlin when Shanti boarded as a student at her home, and later met again and married in England. They were the reason Vikram's mother, initially reluctant to let him go to England on his own, ("sex, drugs and general dissipation were what she feared") finally agreed that he do his O-levels there. In the years that followed, the author developed a close bond with both of them. This, despite the fact that Henny, (quite sensibly!) had "no time for clan commitments in the Indian style.....Whenever my parents called, she would open the door, survey the visitors standing on the top step and shout out, in a view-halloo sort of voice, 'Shanti, your relations are here.'"

It was Vikram Seth's mother who suggested he write about Shanti and Henny, both for Shanti's sake and for Vikram's. Shanti felt lost after Henny's death in 1989, and interviews with him for a possible book would distract him a little. Vikram Seth was looking for a subject for his next book. But it was Vikram's father who discovered that proverbial trunk in the attic, full of Henny's papers, letters, photographs, which proved to be a mainstay of this memoir. Shanti himself had destroyed anything that reminded him of her, but the trunk had survived because it was in a far recess of the attic and had escaped notice.

"But neither he nor I could have anticipated just how rich the material was....Her friends write to her and through the tone of their words create a sense of both their personality and hers. She writes to them, speaking in a voice that recreates her presence, and she says things she never said to Uncle. She talks with pain and clarity about the very matters I would have found it impossible, had she been alive, to broach."

Aunt Henny was a very private person. Should he be making use of letters she had intended for the recipient only? But he does, because he feels they are historically important, and because they help to bring someone he loved to life. Certainly, there are sharp, unexpected reminders in the letters of the deprivation experienced by ordinary people: one letter expresses gratitude for shoelaces sent from England. There are painful issues for Henny: should she believe hints that the husband of one of her friends was collaborating more than he was required to? And all the fear for her mother and her sister, her longing for some information about them.

Perhaps it would have been best to have left it at that, but Seth does a certain amount of political editorializing. He tells us how his views on the Israel/Palestine question gradually changed, and he comments on the irony of victims making victims of others. "Various justifications for the foundation and maintenance of Israel as a specifically Jewish state have been adduced, none of them takes into account the concomitant injustice to the Palestinians. Historical yearning for certain religious sites or landscapes or a belief that one is divinely ordained to possess a particular part of the earth is hardly an excuse for creating one's own living space at the expense of others." Fair enough. But the editorializing would have seemed less extraneous if Seth had related these concerns to the writing of the memoir. How did he keep awareness of later events from tempering his view of his subjects, particularly Henny and her circle? Also, given the fact that there have been countless books, films, poems, and so on about the Holocaust, on what basis did he decide that readers could take more of it? Norman Finkelstein, an American Jewish academic has even talked of the "Holocaust industry", and the fact that persons concerned with it are often more concerned with manipulating the present than understanding the past. What made Seth confident that we would not shy away from yet another story of suffering endured? The basic question for the writer would seem to be: We find it difficult to write about Nature as the Romantics did. Given all that followed the Holocaust, how do we approach such a troubling theme?

Instead of talking as a writer, Seth makes some unwriterly mistakes. He recounts facts about the war as if the reader were reading them for the first time. "After the successes on the continent, Hitler had turned his attention to the invasion of Britain..." There is also a rather undergraduate essay on the role of Germany in European culture.

What is of greater interest is the picture in *Two Lives* of the marriage of Shanti and Henny. It seems to have been a companionable marriage, but not romantic in the usual sense. "Henny and Shanti had been brought closer by the war. He had been the one to meet her when she arrived from Germany. ...It was to him she wrote from the bomb-shelters of the Blitz. Her mother, her sister, and all her friends in Germany were in a separate, incommunicable universe... After he lost his arm, she comforted and encouraged him. But during the month that he was in hospital in Nottingham, she did not visit him..." Both people seem to have possessed exemplary courage: Henny to go on so far from everything that was familiar, he to re-learn how to be a dentist when he had only one arm left. The other was blown off when he was with his unit in Italy. The difficulties Shanti faced as a student, first in Paris and then in Berlin, the later horror of discovering his hard-earned dentistry degree was not recognized in England, are convincingly conveyed.

Shanti went through a prolonged illness towards the end. Delusions seem to have been part of his condition. Possibly this explains the actions that created so much bitterness and disillusionment in the author. Though Shanti had always spoken fondly of family, and was warm with them when they arrived to stay, he not only made some dreadful remark about Vikram's mother, but finally cut her and her brothers completely out of the will. His considerable fortune was divided between Colin, a devoted English friend of his throughout his life, and Arun, the son of one of Shanti's brothers. "Deep revulsion" about all this was one of the factors Vikram Seth had to contend with when he got down to writing the book. Certainly the energy levels of the writing rise when we reach this part.

The blurb tells us that *Two Lives* is a "masterful telling by one of our greatest living authors." *Two Lives,* if one wants a less reckless estimate, is a readable book for the most part, but it would have benefited from a ruthless editor. But publishers tend to like fat books, the fatter the better, and this may have exacerbated Vikram Seth's unevenness and errors of judgement. Despite this, however, a memory of the lives of Shanti and Henny does linger.■

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Mapping a Chronology of Time

Alka Kumar

NANGATALAI KA GAON
By Vishwanath Tripathi
Rajkamal Prakashan, New Delhi and Patna, 2004, pp. 144, Rs.175.00

This literary work, which defies categorization and definition, could perhaps be generically located in the interstitial spaces between personal story as autobiography or memoir, social tract and historical account, objective truth and subjective fact.

I am tempted to describe *Nangatalai ka Gaon* by Vishwanath Tripathi as one of the most challenging literary works that I have ever read. It is also intriguing and complex, primarily because the writer uses a highly sophisticated genre to express his life and times. He describes the work as Smriti-Akhyan, which could translate as 'remembered narrative' or more enigmatically, and more interestingly too, as 'a legend of memory.'

This literary work, which defies categorization and definition, could perhaps be generically located in the interstitial spaces between personal story as autobiography or memoir, social tract and historical account, objective truth and subjective fact. It maps a chronology of time, one which is marked by crucial public events. It is also an account of the sweep of transition and a moving description of village life. It has elements of a story and yet is more than story.

Let me make an attempt to translate the short introduction by the writer as it catches both the spirit of the novel and its hybrid telling. He writes, "This book is about my village. The ways in which I know my village. The speaker is me, the writer, Bisnath. In some parts of the book, Bisnath has made the language somewhat bookish, literary. Bisnath likes to be perceived as a writer, known for being so, so I said to him, get it published under your name. Who can tell the full, one hundred percent truth! Much is hearsay. But, I must say this, I have not intentionally hurt anybody." So there is not one narrator here but two, and of course, Bisnath is Vishwanath himself. This collapse of the two identities gives a playful edge to the narration. Besides, it is a strategy that provides the writer with the opportunity to speak sometimes in his own voice and on other occasions in the voice of his persona, Bisnath. Also in several tongues and dialects, like those used in different parts of India, Urdu and Sanskritized Hindi, but most importantly the language of his village, Biskohar. Sometimes, a difficult read, especially for those readers like myself who read literary texts in Hindi not so regularly.

The opening words are poetic and poignant. My attempts at translating them appear to me to prove the popular opinion held by those who are anti-translation, namely, that poetry is what gets lost in translation. Thus I will quote the original. '*Bisnath ko apne gaon ki yaad chhaya deti hai.*' He goes on to compare the memories of his village to the protective feel of his parents' lap or the gentleness in the eyes of a beloved. The depth of cultural embeddedness, of Indian tradition and thought is implicit also in the description of the imli tree that flowed in unison with the blood in Bisnath's veins. And thus the significance of memory which is for him the fragrance of the first flowers on this tree in the rainy season, or the taste of the chutney made from its flowers and leaves. This literary work, (I suppose I will call it a novel for want of a more appropriate word, as memoir is insufficient too), has a rich abundance of beautiful descriptions of nature, village life, people and emotions, of all aspects of life and living. The tone is often explanatory, the writer sensitive to the fact that all readers may not be familiar with the details of life as it was lived in his village so many decades ago. However, there is also a sense of relish in remembering a time gone by, the leisurely idle times still cherished in memory as life has moved far on in the present, now that Bisnath has lived in Delhi for more than forty years. He often compares the past with the present and in most cases the former comes through with more authenticity and value than the latter, as in the case of Diwali celebrations or the relationship between the Hindus and the Muslims. Of course there is also anarchy and lawlessness, and the novel shows how under the guise of development and progress the young in the village are succumbing to the ill-effects of drugs like mandrax. In *Nangatalai ka Gaon*, factual account intersects lovingly with anecdotal memory till one becomes the other creating a wonderfully exuberant picture of a life lived fully despite poverty and other odds.

The portraits of Lakkha bua, Mijaji baba, Mane and Naipal who shared a homosexual relationship with Shamsher Pradhan, are endearing and progressive. The text shows that various castes in Biskohar lived under the threat of extinction. Regarding those others like the thakurs, brahmins and banias, or the part played by the people in the freedom struggle, the violence that took place in the village when Gandhiji died, the situation of women and dalits— these are all aspects of the book that help to communicate the experiential quality of life lived in the writer's village, Biskohar, during the mid years of the twentieth century. Also, the ways in which the common people would unite, resisting and aggressively killing the exploitative zamindars was also part of the way in which might was the yardstick of right. Despite detailed reconstruction of times gone by oftentimes there is a quaint withdrawl of information, whetting the reader's appetite for more. Perhaps it appears so, as the writer reserves his own clear and direct comments, leaving the reader free to form an opinion or take a position. Although his critique is inherent and implicit both in the content and in the narration there is also a sense of the untold, or a story half told, as the narrator withholds comment on an anecdote or a situation. On some occasions in the book the reader may wish for clearer directions from the writer.

The writer of *Nangatalai ka Gaon* meets his readers in simultaneous roles of social commentator and storyteller, historian and novelist. In fact so inextricable is this dual posture that one merges into the other dissolving all boundaries. As someone steeped far more in the English literary tradition rather than the one to which this book belongs I feel somewhat inadequate in locating it within its own specific literary context. But speaking from within the space where I find myself situated I know this is an important book, unique in the material it makes uses of and masterly in the telling.■

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Sundara Ramaswamy – An Intensely Human Writer

P.A. Krishnan

I was reading *The Tempest* when one of my friends rang to inform me that Sundara Ramaswamy had passed away. I was aware that his health was causing him problems. When I met him this August at his daughter's house in Santa Cruz, California, Sundara Ramaswamy was no doubt weak but there were no indications that death was peering over his shoulders. In Act I, Scene 2 of *The Tempest,* the invisible, exuberant, Ariel sings, in the ear of Ferdinand, a joyful song of death — about a death that hasn't happened. It was this passage that I was reading when the terrible news came. I longed for my friend to ring again and tell me that Su.Raa's death hadn't happened. It is one of the unfulfilled longings of humankind that deaths of those who live their lives in unremitting search for truth never happen. It is these longings that morph into memories when deaths happen. It is these memories that push deaths into a shadow.

Su.Raa, born in the year 1931, lived almost all his life in the southern most town of Nagercoil. Thanks to an attack of rheumatoid arthritis at a young age, he had no formal education to speak of. This constraint didn't tell upon his urge to read voraciously – an urge that stood by him until the very end. Like all sensitive young men of his time he was a Communist in the early fifties of the last century, but the Hungarian Episode caused his break with the party. The Communists never forgot him. Neither did he forget his days with them. Though he meandered all over the philosophical and the spiritual realms, he never forgot Marx either.

Su.Raa has to his credit three novels, a slim book of poems, a fat book of essays and a couple of translations. Considering that he started writing in the year 1950 he can hardly be called prolific. What is unique about him is that whatever he wrote was exceptional. He is one of those rare writers who remained untouched by ordinariness. Su.Raa almost always wrote about his immediate surroundings, about his friends and family members, and about the Tamil country he loved so much. The great writer that he was he had this miraculous gift to see in the small mirror he held the big world with all its myriad complexities. Tamil was never formally taught to him. It was perhaps a blessing. As he learnt the language himself, punditry was not able to contaminate him.

His *Oru Puliamarathin Kathai* (Tale of A Tamarind Tree) is considered a modernist classic by many critics. But Su.Raa was not very comfortable with this classification. In writing this novel he thought he was only doing a duty long expected of a Tamil novelist – the duty of dragging out the Tamil novel from the closed environs of family and standing it in the wide open street. The other strength of this novel is that it records in a brilliant way his total distrust of politicians and other charlatans who come masquerading as public servants.

JJ: Sila Kurippukal (JJ: Some Jottings) is one of the most discussed novels of Tamil. Though its setting is in the Malayalam country, its heart is pure Tamil. It is Su.Raa's answer to Ezra Pound's famous question: Is it new? It is new alright and, what is more, it is an amazing critique of Tamil culture and of the essence of that elusive thing called Tamil existence. It was this novel that brought unending flocks of young writers to Su.Raa's warm and inviting fold.

This third novel *Kuzahnthaikal, Penkal, Ankal* (Children, Women and Men) is a valiant attempt to drag the Tamil novel back to the cloister of family. To our great surprise, we find that the cloister has many worlds jostling for space. These worlds — the children's, the women's and the men's – love, adore, despise, fight, rescue and redeem each other. It is this medley that makes this novel one of the greatest ever written in Tamil. I certainly consider it the best of his three novels.

Though a creative writer, Su.Raa did plant many trees in the arid landscape of Tamil essays. His essays are rapier-sharp and they never indulge in the exercise of trying to please everybody – an exercise in which most Tamil writers are adept.

As a short story writer he had few equals. Many of his earlier stories are splendid examples of how stories that come within the fold of socialist realism can also be outstanding literary creations. His middle period was rather murky and it winded through human landscapes hitherto uncharted. He returned to linear story-telling in his later years and some of his exquisite short stories belong to this period.

I was gratified to hear that Su.Raa's funeral at Nagercoil was attended by many young Tamil writers of consequence. There were a few among them who called him names when he was alive and a few others were those who had once been his disciples but were estranged from him. Their grief, by all accounts, was genuine. Perhaps, the only boon of the burden of loss is that it pulverizes pettiness to dust.

This October was indeed the cruellest month. It took away three giants of Indian Literature. The loss of the Northern duo, Nirmal Verma and Amrita Pritam, was well noticed. Su.Raa, however, did not even merit a mention in either the Delhi newspapers or the Delhi channels. It is easy to come to a conclusion that this unconcern was due to the usual ignorance that the North has of the South. But even *The Hindu* didn't deign even to publish his photograph when its literary section came out with a sickeningly patronizing obituary. The Tamil bigwigs in Delhi didn't bother to take note of Su.Raa's demise. We can ignore the politicians among them. The jejune world of Tamil politics takes note only of those writer-politicians who are recognized as writers only because they are successful politicians. The bureaucrats who carry Tamil names usually wrinkle their noses when they hear Tamil. There is some chance that the most literate among them have heard of Kalki. Or perhaps Akilan. Su.Raa will be an alien name to them. And it is their progeny who strut around in the TV channels or hog the literary sections of the newspapers. No wonder Su.Raa's death went unnoticed.

I wrote of the death that hadn't happened. In *The Tempest* Ariel sings: *Nothing of him doth fade. But suffer a sea-change. Into something rich and strange.* Nothing Su.Raa wrote will ever fade. They may suffer sea-change and future generations of Tamil readers may well find them rich and strange.■

Whodunit Tales

N. Kamala

WITH NO ONE AS WITNESS
WRITE AWAY
By Elizabeth George
Hodder and Stoughton, London, 2004 & 2005, pp. 296 & 584, £11.99 & £3.00 respectively

NOCTURNES
THE BLACK ANGEL
By John Connolly
Hodder and Stoughton, London, 2005 & 2004, pp.446 & 532, £6.90 & £3.00 respectively

What is it about the current crop of writers that makes them kill off a favourite character? From the much hyped Harry Potter release this season to the present book under review it seems to be the fashion to murder an important character. While the first had this fact much tom-tommed prior to the book release, in *With No One as Witness*, Elizabeth George springs this nasty surprise at the end which, from reactions on the web, has all her fans up in arms with cries of strong protest! There are teachers of detective fiction talking about this as a favourite tool manipulated by all authors, be they Dickens, Doyle or George. Many of us avid readers of fiction, crime or otherwise, would like to believe that this is a device for literary reasons and not some purely commercial market study prompted essay at keeping the cash registers ringing. At one time detective fiction as a genre was a cozy read that made sure that an imbalance in the form of a murder in the comfortable known world of the detective would at the end be set right with the astute reasoning and logic of the protagonist's skill and hard work. That is no more a sure thing. Now most times we are left feeling more bereft, have more questions than when we started the book and there is no real triumph of good over evil, of order over chaos, or the assurance of the solid companionship of the main detective with or without his or her subordinate. The twenty-first century obviously calls for more complex and uneasy narratives that enthrall but also disconcert.

The latest offering in the Lynley-Havers series by E. George is as intricately woven as all her previous books especially as the characters are never static entities but grow and evolve with each book and get promoted or demoted according to the demands of the plot. Having discovered with relish this American author only last year, this reviewer has been busy lapping up each book as and when they are available in the bookstore. It has ensured marathon reading periods following the footsteps of the aristocratic, currently Superintendent, Thomas Lynley who is the Earl of Asherton in his other life, and his antithesis the now demoted subordinate, dowdy working class Barbara Havers. From the initial hostility between the working pair to the present comfort level of the two as they set out to catch a serial murderer it has been an engrossing read with twists and turns that don't mock the average reader's intelligence and showcases a fine brain at the pen.

The latest book is about a series of murders of young black and mixed race boys that the police have not connected until the murder of a young white boy. This leads to obvious cries of police racism by the tabloids and social activists. Acting Superintendent Lynley takes charge of the investigation ably helped by Barbara Havers who tries hard not to ruffle official feathers in order to get reinstated and the newly promoted detective sergeant Winston Nkata who is the blatantly token coloured officer named by the very unbearable Assistant Commissioner Sir David Hillier and chosen by him to be present at press conferences. While Nkata knows and chafes against this rather obvious move to deflect criticism he is a much deserving candidate for the job and helps in ways that are subtle and not so subtle. In order to show police procedure and efficiency the team has an 'embedded journalist' from a popular paper, and a psychological profiler assigned to them. Resentment runs high on both counts but the team has to suffer the two (the journalist and the profiler) as they go about doing their job. Forensic scientist Simon Allcourt-St. James, another important character in the series and his photographer wife, Deborah, who are personal friends as well of Lynley and his wife Helen, are also deftly woven into the rich tapestry that Elizabeth George spreads before us. The investigation unfolds to its logical end as more victims are claimed and concludes in a horrific tragedy that is the murder of one of the main characters that has us gasping in disbelief and shock. It is absolutely gut wrenching and leaves the reader with a sense of high passion and real tragedy. 584 pages long and you still don't want it to stop as you wait for things to miraculously get right and revert to normal. Elizabeth George is a sure hand at keeping the suspense high and the prose that is most literary is rich in style and form. With precise timing and elegance she writes a darn good yarn.

If you have never read her before this is the time to go out and buy a copy at once, but my strong advice is to start from her very first and go on to others for her series is not just about whodunit but the tales of all the various characters who people her book. The murder plots run parallel to the private lives of all the individuals making them real flesh and blood characters. They have flaws, are not invincible, have their own quirks and their own sorrows and crosses to bear, so that you are eager to know what they are going to do next as much as who the murderer is! Why her series is such a hit is therefore explained when you read her DIY book *Write Away: One Novelist's Approach to Fiction and the Writing Life*. It explains her philosophy of the craft of writing when she claims correctly that writing is a lot of craft as well as art. Teaching creative writing has surely helped her to clearly structure her approach to writing and to explicate a few hard points. One of which is that while many people want to 'have written' they don't want to write! They want to see their picture on the back cover but not to have gone through the painful process itself. She throws light on the importance of the value of 'bum glue' – of sitting down on the chair and staying there to get the job done. Her excellent characterization is explained best by her own approach to first getting characters mapped out in excruciating detail so that their reactions to situations and events ring true. And as she explains characters without flaws are not interesting so she thinks of all the foibles of most human beings and gets people who breathe life into her books. Characters in conflict are the motor that push the ideas forward. She deals extensively with landscape for she is an American based in California but who sets her novels in London. So to get the setting, the landscape, the atmosphere is important. The places are as detailed as her characters and evoke a background that convey time and place spotlessly. All the various pointers and suggestions are fully illustrated with extracts and examples from other literary works as well as her own. She introduces each chapter with a piece from her own journal showing that even bestselling authors have writing blues and self doubt. These lucid insights into her creative brain show the enormous effort and sweat that go into making each of her books. At the rate of almost one a year that is surely an admirable feat! Many may carp or disagree with her approach to writing as a large part of just craft but it exemplifies how craft goes to add that extra something to that nebulous thing called art…

John Connolly is the author of the *Nocturnes*, a collection of short stories and novellas that are to quote the back cover blurb, 'brilliantly scary', and of *The Black Angel* a full length book in the same genre. The short story collection deals with the supernatural in all the spine chilling, teeth rattling suggestiveness of the unknown. Thirteen (was the number purposely chosen?) stories framed by the opening and closing novellas, not to forget a coda at the end, make us break out in gooseflesh as we read of a the tale of a cancer cowboy, a real killing-killer being who goes out and infects whole towns and villages with his deadly objective and becomes more and more ravenous as he feeds off the population with his kiss of death, or that of the photo of a young child that turns up in the letter box of a dead man's house that portend unspeakable horrors. Ancient religions of shifting sands that defy modern Christian practice, the monkey inkpot that grows larger with

each story written as an author suddenly overcomes his writer's block, and a circus whose clowns return to an ancient spot to reclaim one of their own are tales guaranteed to give you sleepless nights, sweaty palms and the worst of nightmares. *The Black Angel*, the full length novel is a slightly less terrifying work by J Connolly. A street girl goes missing and except for a killer named Louis who is her 'blood' nobody could care less about her disappearance. The story recounts the man's attempt to get at the truth by enlisting the help of private detective Charlie Parker who has his own demons to deal with. It is not the simple story of a 'simple' murder case but one where old religious mysteries going back to the fall of the angels who take the form of normal human beings and roam the earth and call themselves 'the *believers*' in order to find the one angel that had been captured and trapped in a silver mould is told. The fallen angels are responsible for the murders that litter the narrative and the text shifts from World War II to the present, from the USA to Sedlec, where there actually exists a church full of ossuary, the supposed inspiration for this book. It is grim, it is black, and it is without hope almost. There are a few saving moments when in the beginning we are told 'Most criminals are kind of dumb, which is why they are criminals. If they weren't criminals they'd be doing something else to screw up people's lives, like running elections in Florida.' But such lines are few and far in between. Maybe more tongue-in-cheek comments could have lightened the heavy atmosphere and the very depressing tale in various shades of black. There are not even grays to alleviate the weighing down! For those of you who like to live on the edge, wanting the abyss to open and swallow you up, John Connolly is the author for you. While the novel is more readable than his collection of stories, he is an author not meant for the faint hearted or for the bright positivist reader. Best read when you are not feeling suicidal.■

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A Brain-teaser

Kishore Thukral

MESSRES (SIC) DICKENS, DOYLE & WODEHOUSE PVT. LTD.
By Neelum Saran Gour
Halcyon Books, Allahabad, 2005, pp. 215, Rs. 220.00

Now here's a bold book that attempts to bring together in its leaves three literary giants whose writings belong to three entirely different genres. No mean task this, considering also that the gentlemen were not contemporaries, despite being very nearly so.

Charles Dickens is widely regarded as first and foremost a storyteller, and that was how the contemporary public viewed him. That his works reflected the rapid changes that were occurring in the wake of the Industrial Revolution did not, in his own eyes, make him a practical reformer. Arthur Conan Doyle's writings, especially his series on Sherlock Holmes, on the other hand seldom dealt with social and political issues of the time, and this despite him being a keen crusader for social reform. In fact Doyle twice ran for Parliament, albeit unsuccessfully. As regards P.G. Wodehouse, his interest in the politics of the time was woefully lacking, even though the time in which he lived is generally acknowledged as the most violent epoch in the history of humankind. Indeed the two World Wars seem to have had little impact on the writer and his oeuvre.

Bringing these three literary giants together, therefore, and knitting their immortal characters into the fabric of a singular story is a Herculean task. Add to that the chore of replicating their respective language, both Victorian converse and contemporary, somber and comic, lucid and mystifying, and what you have is a sure-fire formula for trouble. But not so for Neelum Saran Gour, who accomplishes the endeavour with the proficiency of a seasoned writer. Hence we have an intriguing narrative that opens at 221

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Baker Street, inhabited as usual by Doyle's Sherlock Holmes and frequented by Watson. The new addition to the locale is Wodehouse's inimitable stiff upper lip, Jeeves, who is now in the employ of the master detective. And lending mystery and conundrum to the plot are Dickens's David Copperfield, Estella, Nicholas Nickleby and Oliver Twist and their inexplicable experiences with an enigmatic character that belongs completely to Saran Gour's own imagination.

The story proceeds at a fast pace, as mysteries should, in order to sustain the reader's interest. Holmes' and Watson's attention is drawn from the ordeals of one Dickensian character to another, from the curious case of David Copperfield's death to Estella's immolation, to Nickleby's and Twist's twin murder. There is a common villainous refrain that links the three episodes, yet despite his astuteness and deductive abilities Sherlock Holmes, for once, has to concede defeat – something that probably Arthur Conan Doyle would himself have steered clear of. After all, the public outcry at Holmes' death, forcing Doyle to resurrect him, is well known. On leaving the mystery unsolved, however, what Saran Gour succeeds in doing is joggle the imagination of her reader. This reviewer, for one, after all possible inferences, suspicions and reasoning, has come to the conclusion that the murderer of the four dramatis personae is none other than their creator himself, Charles Dickens. Blasphemous it may sound, but the fact that Sherlock Holmes' last encounter with the blackguard is set in Gad's Hill Place, Dickens's country house, only lends credibility to this presumption. The author herself acknowledges that "…Dickens's study, his bookshelves with the dummy books, the underground tunnel, etc.…have found their way into this novel."

Admirers of Wodehouse may complain that there isn't enough of Jeeves in the book, that it dismisses the irredeemably dim and unflaggingly affable Bertie Wooster with just a passing reference or two. However, they must take heart from the fact that each time he finds himself in a quandary, Sherlock Holmes has to resort to the peerless butler for a possible answer.

There is one other lament that today's reader may have. The language, at times, is more archaic than Victorian. To quote Nickleby : "Mr. Twist, sir, has a splendid disposition for discourse on all matters metaphysical which, united to a zealous and troublous soul and a proclivity for tumultuous musings, soon had us holding converse as those noble souls who have happily found tenancy in the Elysian fields. For he is full of utterance and speaks of deep and lofty matters with great and mellifluous earnestness, in titanic accents or tortured murmurs, elucidating his private passions with great solemnity." As also : "For he was a man of undaunted pertinacity, of a constitutional impatience, great asperities of temper, sagacious but acrimonious and with an inordinate appetite for rigorous and pompous peroration. And he did contumeliously assume command of everything and comport himself with such savage scorn that our dignity suffered considerable diminution." It is for this reason, misplaced as it may sound, that the book runs the risk of being branded a novel by a student of literature, for the student of literature.

Another observation – perhaps the title escaped the eye of the proof-reader. Otherwise it ought to have been "Messrs…" and not "Messres…". At least that's how the Oxford, Chambers and Cambridge dictionaries spell the word. All in all, nevertheless, a highly entertaining read, and a brain-teaser to boot.■

Kishore Thukral is a Delhi based writer, and author of *The Chronicler's Daughter*. He is presently awaiting the publication of his second book. He writes in both English and Hindi.

Relationships As Navarasa

Sachidananda Murthy

MISTRESS
By Anita Nair
Penguin India, New Delh,i 2005, pp.426, Rs. 350.00

What holds the book on premarital, marital, nonmarital and extra marital sex is the way the author binds it with Kathakali, the fabulous dance drama of Kerala. Not only is one of the principal protagonists a Kathakali artiste of international fame, but the different phases of the interplay of the characters is expressed through the navarasas — the nine phases of human emotions.

Anita Nair's new novel is a book on relationships, told in many voices, going back and forth in time, across continents. It is a book which deals with infatuations and obsessions across the gulfs of religion, marriage, legitimacy and conventions. Most of the affairs that develop come with a whiff of bad endings, like the river Nila which rarely has enough water and symbolizes the shallowness of the life of the main characters. Guilt courses through the book as a companion to the glory of love and beastliness of lust.

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It has been an ancient literary maxim that an epic should depict the navarasas in the right proportion. The nine — shringaraam(love), haasaym (flirting comedy), karunam (sorrowful compassion), raudram (fury), veeram (valour) bhayaanakam (fearsome), bheebhatsam (disgust), adbhutam(wonder) and shaantam (serene, calm) -- properly enacted, keep audiences spellbound through the night of flickering oil lamps. But an epic does not have epochal characters and Nair has deliberately decided that her characters are not larger than life. Even Koman, the Kathakali veshakaaran (player) a man of many masks but without the colour of the masks, is a pale, indecisive personality.

Mistress is a novel which at one level looks at the turbulence in the lives of Radha and Shyam, a couple who are close relatives,with all the baggage of large families where dependency breeds strong emotions. Shyam, a self made enterpreneur who has been humiliated as a boy and youth by his uncle, gains a sense of power when he is rushed into a marriage with his cousin Radha, who gets pregnant from an affair with a married colleague. After marraige, power shifts and yet Radha feels trapped in an unhappy marraige, made more difficult by Shyam's low sperm count, which means the couple have no children.

Enter Chris, a cello playing American writer-journalist, who becomes a presence in Shyam's resort by the river Nila and has an affair with Radha. Chris himself has come to probe indirectly whether he is the son of Koman, Radha's uncle, who has had affairs galore with Indian and American women during his long career as a top Kathakali dancer. The paterntiy question rears up as Chris wonders if Koman is his father. Radha has to grapple with questions on whether an uncle, who had an affair with her mother, is her father. Koman, who is the link to their families, has the answer to both the questions.

Obviously parental love is in short supply for the principal characters, who thereby grow into complex characters, haunted by insecurities which gives them opportunities. If Shyam is totally materialistic, Radha is portrayed as purely sensual and artistic, so that the poles repel and attract each other.

However, Mistress is a good read because of the felicity of language with which Nair takes the narrative through its twists and U turns. It is a meandering river of action and memories, but on the way she creates some amazing locales and minor characters, which do not suffer the slow motion treatment often given to the main players of the novel. Vignettes which are a sheer joy to read include the evolution of the isolated village of Muslims where strangers are not allowed , the pork eating Brahmin villager or the Bible quote spewing doctor, assisted by three sisters who are nurses, who saves Koman's father Sethu from drowning. Nair's description of these communities and characters is lyrical, so that the reader keeps returning to these passages, especially the love of a Muslim girl who has never sighted a strange man for a face she sees fleetingly in a street. He becomes her Malik and the girl's passion stirs up a community which has been cocooned on the Bay of Bengal coast for centuries.

The yearning for the forbidden fruit of love — barred by religion, gender, marriage — is a recurrent theme in *Mistress* as the novelist probes into the heart of her characters as they devise strategems and excuses to pluck the fruit and suffer the inevitable consequences. She also coalesces some of the mythological stories, which are the staple of Kathakali, finding parallels from the myth for the turmoil of her Radha, Shyam, Chris and Koman, especially of Koman. The vivacity and vacuousness of the Kathakali characters come through the life and death of Aashan, the artist-teacher who develops Koman into a man who is there for art's sake, rather than Koman's competitor Sundaram who reaps spectacularly the benefits of art's commercialization. Nair's love for the beauty of her native land comes across powerfully through the descriptions of the seasons, fruits and plants of the verdant land of Kerala. Nair's enthusiasm makes one want to acquaint oneself with flowers like balsam, hibiscus, birds like the Indian tree pie, koel, woodpecker or paradise flycatcher by visiting Shoranur, even though it is not in league with the hot tourist destinations of Kerala. Nair's imagination makes Kerala Passion's Own Country, though the Passion is accompanied by guilt and betrayal.■

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Making of An Athlete

Anoop Verma

THE LONGEST RACE
By Tom Alter
IndiaInk (Imprint of Roli Books Pvt. Ltd.), Delhi, 2005, pp. 181, Rs. 250.00

Being fungible is a key trait of today's highfliers, in the arena of job profile at least. Don't we love to rant about sportsmen, particularly cricketers, delving into the realm of Bollywood when they appear in commercials and even TV serials and films? But what about Bollywood actors delving into the realm of sports, when they talk ad nauseam on diverse issues related to intricacies of the game, or making of an athlete. Moreover, what about actors who double up as politicians and vice versa! What about eminent doctors, lawyers doubling as politicians or actors!

So why are celebrities with multifarious personalities becoming as common as packets of baked beans? The answer is obvious. In today's cultural environment public memory is so short lived, that celebrities from all walks of life -- sportsmen, actors, politicians, even journalists and writers — have to be proficient in donning multiple hats, or they risk fading into a dreary dustbin of oblivion. Though it has to be said that activities of some amongst the thin crowd of celebrities may not be driven by fear of oblivion, their involvement in extracurricular activities might subsume a genuine interest.

Tom Alter may as well fall into the later category. A veteran actor of more than 200 films, he is also an avid sports commentator, popular writer and a much sought after master of ceremonies. Though acting is his self confessed first love, his devotion to sports is no less genuine. In 1996 he completed a full marathon, no mean feat at the age of 46. In the book under review, he describes with infectious enthusiasm the making of a great athlete. The hard work that goes into it and the moral blankness that the athlete is pitted against at every step of the long arduous way to the top.

Set in the lofty landscape of the Mussoorie hills, *The Longest Race* is the unassuming tale of a lad called Bahadur, his journey through life, his desire for running, his ill fated brush with everlasting success and enduring fame, his love for the unassuming and ambivalent Sharmila. Though the son of a humble watchman, Bahadur is a deeply emotional man, his integrity as strong as the feet that labour to win him myriad races. Tom Alter incorporates a quote at the beginning of every chapter. The quote that heralds the first chapter says: "*I too want to be a great champion. ...And the journey begins.*" The statement portrays Bahadur's athletic spirit—his desire to run, his desire to be a great champion.

Bahadur's career as a competitive runner has a real takeoff when Greg Abberley, the legendary Scottish coach, who has trained some of England's finest athletes, notices him. Abberley takes Bahadur with him to Scotland and moulds him into an athlete capable of winning the world's most prestigious tournaments. For a time Bahadur is on a winning spree, but just when he is at the peak of his running career, the Machiavellian politics of sports intervenes to arrest his growth and he finds himself caught in a web of disillusionment that he cannot breakaway from. He bids adieu to his athletic career.

Why does Bahadur cave in to the impedimenta that the sport bureaucracy throws his way? Tom Alter would like us to believe that his protagonist is too noble to let politics influence his running career. There is no question that the story would have been lot more inspiring if Bahadur had taken a stand and tried to reform the sports bureaucracy. But then it won't have been the story of an Indian athlete. In India the bureaucracy always reigns supreme, the athlete is always forced to sacrifice his career at the altar of politics.

Bahadur's story is the story of many Indian sportsmen, whose dreams are destined to rot amidst the dusty files of redtape. He smacks of a defeatist attitude when he dissuades his foster son from taking running as career with these words, 'Then do not run. That is all I can say for right now. Just do not run. Do you understand?' Bahadur may have given up running for good, but the runner was still alive inside him. And one day when some criminals kidnap his son, he runs again. This is his longest run. His feet ferry him across a vast distance and make it possible for him to be in nick of time to rescue his son.

This successful longest run was all that was needed to reawaken his love for running. And he takes back the earlier defeatist advice he had given to his son. In a fitting climax to the novel, he now urges his son to run, 'I was wrong. If you want to run, run. Run and run and run. It is a gift. Love it. It will give you joy which no man can describe.' This was Bahadur's longest run. Not the physical run that he ran, but the inner psychological racetrack that he traverses on wings of his thoughts, at the finishing line of which he could recoup his love for running.

The book is very easy to read as Tom Alter writes lucidly, about as lucidly as he delivers those pithy dialogues in his films. But in the end it has to be said, that Tom will always be better known as an actor. Acting is his forte to the extent that writing is never going to be.■

Anoop Verma is a critic and the author of *A Thread of Life* (Shrishti 2005)

A Whydunit Tale

Bunny Suraiya

THE SUNDAY PHILOSOPHY CLUB
By Alexander McCall Smith
Abacus, 2005, pp. 297, £2.50

Isabel Dalhousie is the literary descendant of Emma Woodhouse in Jane Austen's eponymous novel. Like Miss Woodhouse, Miss Dalhousie is a lady of comfortable means, solidly upper middle class and with an interest in people which the uncharitable would say borders on the "meddlesome". But there the comparison ends. Emma Woodhouse has none of the intellectual rigour that distinguishes Isabel Dalhousie, who, apart from being the editor of a philosophical journal, *The Review of Applied Ethics*, also solves mysteries that come her way, in an investigative style that focuses not so much on whodunit as *whydunit*.

Indeed, it is her constant questionings, her posing of moral dilemmas, the case continually being made out for and against situational ethics, that makes Isabel Dalhousie such a fascinating character, and this book such an enjoyable read. No activity is too mundane for Isabel to ponder its' rightness – and to make the reader do so as well. Take for instance, the everyday task of reading the newspaper.

"The crossword would start the day, and then she would glance at the news itself, trying to avoid the salacious court cases which seemed to take more and more newspaper columns. There was such an obsession with human weakness and failing; with the tragedies of peoples' lives; with the banal affairs of actors and singers. You had to be aware of human weakness, of course, because it simply *was*, but to revel in it seemed to her to be

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voyeurism, or even a form of moralistic tale telling. And yet, she thought, o I not read these things myself? I do. I am just as bad as everybody else, drawn to these scandals. She smiled ruefully, noticing the heading: MINISTER'S SHAME ROCKS PARISH. Of course she would read that, as everybody else would, although she knew that behind the story was a personal tragedy, and all the embarrassment that goes with that."

Alexander McCall Smith gives us an engaging portrait of a lively, intelligent lady (the term was invented for people like Isabel Dalhousie) in the gracious, staunchly upright, culturally aware social milieu of Edinburgh. McCall Smith writes with great sympathy and charm, and is able to turn his main characters into the 'rounded' personalities so admired by E. M. Forster, introducing them to the reader as people as real as one's own friends and relations. This art is what makes the reader rejoice when a sequel comes along; you just don't want to say goodbye to people you have come to know and whose company you enjoy. For me, *The Sunday Philosophy Club* (which never does manage to meet, by the way) was the key to enter the two wonderful worlds created by McCall Smith; the Edinburgh of Isabel Dalhousie and the Botswana of Precious Ramotswe. I immediately went out and got hold of the next Isabel Dalhousie novel, *Friends, Lovers, Chocolate,* and as many of the Botswana novels as I could lay my hands on.

I strongly recommend not just this book, but all of Alexander McCall Smith's books. There are wonderful friends to be made within their pages.■

Bunny Suraiya heads her own Communication and Design company and also writes features and reviews for periodicals and newspapers in India and abroad.

Affirmations of Life

G.J.V. Prasad

IN THAT SENSE YOU TOUCHED IT
By Ketaki Kushari Dyson
UNQUIET WATERS
By Lakshmi Kannan
Sahitya Akademi, Delhi, 2005, pp. 193, Rs. 90.00

LIFE – ON MY SIDE OF THE STREET AND OTHER POEMS
By Anna Sujatha Mathai
DIALOGUE AND OTHER POEMS
By Priya Sarukkai Chabria
Sahitya Akademi, Delhi, 2005, pp. 157, Rs. 90.00

These two volumes of poetry need to be noticed for more than one reason. This is perhaps the first time that the Sahitya Akademi has published English writings. This is truly welcome in poetry, where even established poets struggle to find publishers. These two-in-one books, 'double-decker' volumes as Keki Daruwalla (who has edited and written an introduction to each volume) calls them, of poetry by women give space to three established and one new poet, all of them deserving of this hallowed space. These two volumes certainly fulfill the aims that Sahitya Akademi seems to have set itself in this venture – "to project Indian poetry in English by women writers, so that the larger reading public becomes aware of their nuanced sensitivity and the infinite variety of their concerns". Aptly, the poets chosen for these volumes, Ketaki Kushari Dyson and Lakshmi Kannan, and Anna Sujatha Mathai and Priya Sarukkai Chabria, and their poems showcase a great deal of variety and nuanced sensitivity.

As Keki Daruwalla says in his introduction, Ketaki Dyson and Lakshmi Kannan make a good pair because both are bilingual writers, the first writing in Bengali as well and the other in Tamizh. Ketaki Dyson has lived in England for a long time now but has maintained close links with the Bengali literary life. As her son Igor puts it in 'Reflections on the Halves of Normality', India is "the other half of normality" for them. Quite appositely, her part of the volume, entitled "In That Sense You Touched It", begins with poems of return to Calcutta: After swimming the channel of three years and/ five thousand miles/ the first night – the first port of call – / is always tricky, prickly with spooky vibes.

Before you say not one more NRI, there are only three poems that deal directly with India, and this NRI observes with an acuity and sympathy. In 'A View from a Balcony in Lake Town, Calcutta: A Man, a Dog, and Some Crows', Dyson notices a man "cleaning and slicing carp/ before a rich man's mansion". He is watched from a distance by a dog and some crows. As he walks away after selling the fish, the poet says that though he won't feed them with the waste in front of the house, "he knows the hunger/ of his fellow creatures". She sees him feed them with affection at a distance, before he "goes his way./ He must sell more fish, then he too/ will lunch at midday." This is a tender poem, an ode to humanity. But then so are most others in this collection, a few are songs of joy, all are affirmations of life, however difficult these affirmations may be in this world of ours.

The normal world is a twisted one, where co-op shops in England can source their produce from all around the world, just as rich patients in the West can source their kidneys from "the back alleys of Madras", where the US and the UK can go hunting weapons of mass destruction while guns are sold and used freely in the US, as freely as they are used in Northern Ireland, where the explosive used in Bali targeting western tourists was manufactured in the USA, where all the hunt for WMD yielded was the shikar of Uday and Qusay (crooked and cruel though they may have been), the sons of Saddam Hussain, and the display of their corpses.

This is a world where everything affects everyone, a world where passions like the fruit reach across fences, where this Bengali attempts to make the South Indian sambaar in England, having also partaken of it in South America,

a world in which a poem written in the US, 'Thanksgiving 1940', and sent to the poet can link with Midnapore and Cox's Bazaar and Meherpur, with the refugees from Burma and the bombings by the Japanese and the Bengal Famine, with an ordinary German and an unnamed Englishman, with the poet's parents, and with the Warsaw Ghetto and a survivor, Wladyslaw Szpilman, and in a final twist it connects with a ship, *Fort Strikine*, that exploded in Bombay Harbour killing thousands – the ammunition it was carrying was meant to kill after all, what does it matter ultimately who died!

Ketaki Kushari Dyson is a poet who connects and connects brilliantly, almost seamlessly, and, thus, makes a great story teller.

Lakshmi Kannan is a poet of relationships, and a touching poem to her late husband begins her half of the volume, *Unquiet Waters*, which is divided into four sections. The poem, 'For Arun', is a good example of the way in which she works on the image to yield its fullest range of representation – she takes the image of a droplet of water on a lotus leaf which is said to symbolize detachment and then in the next three three-lined stanzas establishes how "Water and leaf/ Jewelled together/ even in their separateness." Lakshmi Kannan's English poetry is continuous with her cultural lives as an Indian, with the lives she leads in different languages and locations. Hence the easy allusions to myth and religion and other Indian literary texts that pepper her poems, helping to flavour as well as carry further the meaning. And interestingly, this poet of relationships is also a poet of women including their strategies for survival, their inner lives. She celebrates Rasha Sundari Debi as well as the woman, "full forty years old", who stands in the rain "quenching/ the enormous thirst of her being". 'An Autopsy' reveals how a woman "had stashed away her private moments" in her innermost being, her brains.

While 'Family Tree' seems to signal poems about the ingratitude of children to the mother, there are at least two poems about the understanding and love between the poet and her own mother that follow almost immediately after. The first is a poem that almost all of us would identify with – about the mother who returns gifts "with that look/ we dreaded. 'Sorry, but I can't / take them with me, can I?' it said." In a startling shift, her mother becomes the sea returning all the treasures thrown to it, so trivial, having the last laugh. These poems talk of lives of women, intertwined with those of rivers, the cycles that rule their lives. There is hurt but there is also assertion, and celebration (take the image of the three generations of women plaiting hair).

The second section, 'Waters', stands out for its inclusiveness and vision. It begins with a poem about the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and follows it with a stunning poem on the aarti on the Ganges. The third section, "Tideway" contains the unexpected, poems of leavetaking, including a poem for the late A.K. Ramanujan. The last section, "Towards Visarjan", begins with the highly quotable and anthologizable poem 'Unquiet Waters' which begins, "I take the shape/ of the receptacle that holds me." The section quickly moves on to four poems on Ganesha, all of which are tenderly detailed. I can only end with the last lines of the volume, towards which Lakshmi Kannan had been taking us expertly: "Would I ever learn/ from him to dissolve, to mix/ the earth of my being/ with the waters?"

Ketaki Kushari Dyson and Lakshmi Kannan are two women poets who have written long and hard and this volume showcases their talent.

The next volume contains poems by Anna Sujatha Mathai and Priya Sarukkai Chabria, one who is well known in literary circles and the other for whom this is a debut collection even if she has a well-noticed novel to her credit already. Anna Sujatha Mathai is of a generation that was made to feel guilty about writing in English, especially if the writer was creative only in that language. However, this does not mar(k) her poetry in any manner, which hardly ever gestures to any other Indian language. Interestingly, in this collection, there seem to be echoes of (or, should I say, intertextual references to) Kamala Das's early poetry – the first poem of her section, "Life – On My Side of the Street and Other Poems", is 'Summer in Delhi', and there is another poem called 'The Riddle of the Eunuchs'. However, the poems of Mathai's in this collection are melancholic in spirit, more about ends than beginnings or peaks. She sees the Icarus in us all, "Dreams, wings, melting in the sun, / vivid, alive, for a moment, / now dashed to pieces on the rock below. / All, all of us, pilgrims of the skies."

Anna Sujatha Mathai is a poet who makes no claims to inspiration; her poetry has to take life "day by day, / inch by inch". Her subject is loss – this is a poet of twilights, who sees that memory can ambush bringing unexpected pain, and she will give voice to those whose years have been "laid waste by the locust". Her poetry is about lost loves, of being shipwrecked, without anchor or even a sense of belonging. The forest and the sea are her elements but both overwhelm even as they keep secrets. Mathai is a poet of sensitivities, a poet who shows how we cause pain to each other, even in our search for love and togetherness. The children are lost, the perfect child never born, and grandparents are tolerated and shut out, like "Mirrors with sheets thrown over/ to keep out dust/ or shut out reflections, / hide obscenities of loneliness'. She weaves the carpet of tragedy, the permanence of the universe, and the fleeting nature of our lives. Obviously, she will write on street children, and the Warsaw Ghetto and Tiananmen Square. She writes of what we do to each other, what men do to women, and what we do to ourselves.

Priya Sarukkai Chabria's inclusion in this series of two books is an inspired choice. For hers is a fresh but accomplished voice, one that claims its inheritances from all sources and traditions that she has access to. Her section of the book, titled "Dialogue and Other Poems", opens with 'Dialogue – 1', a series of poems in the Tamil akam tradition. These are love poems, poems that are written in various voices, of women and men in love, but also of friends and observers. Full of striking imagery, the form of these poems allows the passion to be expressed in fullness, without it becoming an outpouring of emotions. The striking first poem ends with these lines: "I am parched. Riven/ by longing, caked by the long dust of denial. / And yet I'll come to you like the first rain, / fragrant and trusting." The man's voice is equally passionate and lyrical, "I wished to hold/ her like a mountain holds fire-clouds, / free yet bewitched, her tenderness/ raining down the slopes of my life." This series of seven poems shows what a contemporary poet can do with this traditional form.

"Dialogue – 2" is a selection from poems written for a Bharatanatyam performance. Inspired by Sanskrit poetics, these poems too interact with classical conventions with consummate ease. The nayaka says, in the first poem of this section, that he is not any of the traditional metaphors used to describe longing but "just myself/ teetering on the girder of expectancy/ fireflies rising from my pores." The poems explore various emotions and themes from expectation to fear, loneliness, seeking, meeting, loss, anger, resurgence and celebration. While love is "the absurd bliss" to be celebrated, what binds all lovers is the "red of anger and hurt" when one of the two leaves, "Like a snake sloughing off old skin".

The next sections, "Plant-Life-Stories", "The Grove", "Conversations", and "Hospital" move to the contemporary, even autobiographical, while "Flight: In Silver, Red and Black" is the result of interacting with medieval Japanese poetry. The first of these is a poetic response to failure in love, while the next is an attempt at the pastoral in today's urbanized world, a series inspired by the cutting down of trees. "Conversations" is about death and killing that characterizes the world today. "Hospital" contains poems written about (during?) the hospitalization of the poet's grandmother but, while they are autobiographical, the poems are not confessional, they are vignettes about ageing and about the way bodies betray the mind; one of these poems, quite differently, is about the way hospitals treat the poor and how they have learnt to survive. While 'Flight' ends with the assertion that if "life together is a golden egg', then at the centre is an unbridgeable "vacuum that holds us tight". This is a contemporary poet of love who accepts separateness. The poem that ends this volume is an invocation, written after the Gujarat pogrom, and it begins with this wish: "Make me dew that touches all/ without distinction" just as good poetry should.

These are great books to own and read. Wonderfully produced, with striking covers designed by Allain Willaume, meticulously edited (Keki Daruwalla, take a bow and start courses for publishing houses), and miraculously priced (Rs 90 each!), these books need to be in every book shop and every shelf. Sahitya Akademi has shown that it can reinvent itself for this century, but this century also demands crafty marketing, so hopefully they will go for it. But even if they don't, you should.■

G.J.V. Prasad discusses life and literature at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

Life as a Series of Windows

Usha Kishore

LOOKING IN, LOOKING OUT
By Shanta Acharya
Headland, UK, 2005, £7.50

Looking In, Looking Out, Shanta Acharya's third poetry collection, houses fifty-two poems, representing work over a decade. Most of these poems have appeared in journals and anthologies, internationally. The title defines the theme of the collection — the poet and her environment. The collection is a journey, traversing the dimensions of the personal, collective, national and international. The collection's *avant gardism,* the empire writing from the cosmopolitan centre, is striking!

Acharya's is a global, poetical vision that projects the internal dimension in conjunction with the external. The critic Glyn Pursglove has rightly commented that Acharya's poetry "registers her Indian origins without ever being merely exotic". The collection is comprehensive — there is feminism here and cosmopolitanism, rubbing shoulders with mysticism, intellectualism and lyricism.

A number of poems reflect on the arts — both performing and creative. The opening poem, 'At the Edge of the World', musing on Anish Kapoor's "creations" at the Hayward Gallery, 1998, highlights the entire collection itself:

Once inside, the world is turned upside down,
inside out, disoriented through double mirrors,
emptied of space funnelling into arupa,
untitled, leaving us newly-born, fearful of oblivion.

These lines are reminiscent of *Through the Looking Glass* and the underlying exploration of time and space:

Imagination turns earth and stone into sky.
In the dark, polished hollow of a marble mummy,
a fleeting spirit appears. A twisting column of light,
I flicker before giving up the ghost.

Other poems in this series include 'The Saviour', 'The Vision of Saint John', 'Lost in Africa' and 'Xochipilli'. These poems portray the poet's preoccupation with paintings and sculptures from around the world — African, Mexican, Continental, Russian and Indian. Here the multicultural Londoner speaks — projecting the co-existence of modernity and tradition as reflected in 'Xochipilli' — the Mexican God of Poetry and Performing arts:

Posing for us at the Royal Academy of Arts
Xochipilli, do you feel at home—
seated upright, cross-legged on a decorated
seat...

...as much in vogue as your necklace
from the skin of the head of a jaguar?

As a South Indian, the poem 'Bharata Natyam' was a trip down memory lane for me. The *natya, nritya* and *abhinaya* element of this dance form are brilliantly depicted. The poem describing a performance of *Varnam* in raga *charukeshi* set to *adi tala,* transports me into "the arena of gods and goddesses" in much frequented dance halls of my native Kerala. The Bhakti element in *Bharatnatyam* is illustrated in the "chanting of *slokas*" and the:

... eternal search of the lover
for the beloved concealed in maya,
smoke gets in your eyes when there is fire in your heart.

In this poem, the Indian Prakriti-Purusha element crosses genre from Dance to Poetry and vice-versa:

When hands can speak, eyes can kill, feet can draw—
bodies move in spheres of mystic law.

The collection has poems reflecting on the poetic process, on poetry itself. These poems have a delicate touch of cynicism and humour. The poet writes about the creative process in 'Of Poems' as follows:

They seldom arrive at your door ringing your bell...
...
They are more inclined to trespass your thoughts...
...
They expect you to drop everything,
be eternally ready for their reception.

Acharya feels that poems are no different than children:

at first clinging to your inner being and soul,
inhabiting your body's every cell.

The poet's sense of solitude is highlighted in 'A Poet's RSVP':

...sorry I cannot come to your dinner party;
...I need aeons to dream.

I have unquenchable desires that will not be slaked
with your rich party food, dance, drinks, drugs or men.

And 'Poetry Reading' reflects on:

How much pep talk does a poem need?
If the poem speaks not for itself,
alas, the poet must speak.

Acharya has been organizing poetry readings at Lauderdale House, in London, since 1996; the poem projects this aspect of her life. The best poem in this section is 'Perhaps', dedicated to Nissim Ezekiel, and speaks of the poet's melancholy:

Perhaps we were never meant
to be like other creatures...
...Perhaps, being unhappy, never feeling at home
is our only hope, our promised salvation.

Acharya, the cosmopolitan poet gives expression to her Hindu background. She explores the popular Hindu myth of Yasoda and Krishna in 'Yasoda's Vision' where Yasoda commands "Krishna to reveal the contents of his mouth" and sees the:

..birth of the universe—
the sun, moon, stars, galaxies,
...not a life, leaf, stone, word, person missing.
...the essence of Creation

This fascinating Indian myth has taken many forms over the centuries. Acharya's version is commendable. There is a certain amount of cynicism in poems like 'Of Magic and Men', where the poet feels that "in a Hindu world of fantasy and fable,/myths, legends, gods and demons, /irrationality appears reasonable –". The blind beliefs and superstitions of Hinduism detract from its true meaning:

..If our gods can eat and sleep,
steal buttermilk, make love, fall ill,
...what's so surprising about drinking some milk?
After all, it has been one long, hot, desiccating summer!

The Indian juggling of science and religion in a contemporary world is magic realism in action! The poet muses on this unique aspect of Indianness:

God's in heaven and all's wrong with our world —
except miracles unfurl daily to the faithful
not impervious to the mystery of the universe

This openness is also part of the poet's persona. The cosmopolitan, London-based Indian poet's vision embraces the universe. Her 'My Good Luck Home' is crowded with Egyptian scarabs, Chinese cats, the seven gods of luck from Japan and "Ganesha, who travels with me in my handbag".

Various aspects of womanhood are also tackled in several poems. "Job Hunting" is based on a woman's experience, where the would-be boss tries to seduce her in his limousine:

He promised me a job in
exchange of favours titillating:

The prospect of which
gave me gooseflesh…

The jilted woman in 'The Singing Bird' decides to "get a life; that'll show him" and makes a list of things to be done:

- *Get a complete make-over—face, clothes, shoes*
- *Go on a fabulous holiday*
- *Throw a party in celebration of 'single' status*

and decides: "No more lousy jobs: become a freelancer". The modern situation of women in any modern city is elaborated here, emphasizing the resilience of womanhood. 'Mrs Kafka's Dilemma' reminds me of the British poet Carol Ann Duffy's *The World's Wife*, with its metamorphosis of Mrs Kafka into Medusa and the plot to murder the husband. The title poem 'Looking In, Looking Out' is also about a woman lost in love who "can no longer recall what it felt like to be desired." The poem ends in introspection for the protagonist and the poet:

The mind's windows are uniquely tainted. My thoughts
dance feverishly on the stained-glass windows of my cathedral
swooning like flies against walls that limit my explorations.

The collection reflects the world of the poet, who is at ease in cosmopolitan, multicultural London. With a plethora of sensuous images, experiments with poetic form and multifarious themes, reflections and meditations, the collection is thought provoking; and from it emerges the poet, bringing out the new colour of cosmopolitanism to the Asian diaspora. The boundaries of the poetic self and the environment are frequently crossed and people, cultures and places are artfully woven into *Looking In, Looking Out*. Life becomes a series of windows, which reveal its various moods like an art gallery "changing with hours and angles of light". The poet becomes a philosopher, an observer of her self and her world, waiting for:

things to be revealed to us,
Life and Time have their way…

Usha Kishore, born and brought up in Kerala, now lives on the Isle of Man, UK. Educated in India and the UK, Usha lectures in English at the Isle of Man College. Her poetry and critical articles have been published in the UK, Ireland and India.

Ethnography

The Black Cows' Footprint by Richard K. Wolf is targeted towards ethnomusicologists, anthropologists, folklorists, scholars of religion and Asian Studies and those interested in spacetime theories, the Nilgiris and groups hitherto classified as tribal.
Permanent Black, 2005, pp. 313, Rs. 795.00

Film Studies

The Art of Cinema: An Insider's Journey Through Fifty Years of Film History by B.D. Garg delves into the vast repertoire of his scholarship and experience and discusses the contribution of men behind the screen—the director, editor, cinematographer and profiles some of the greatest masters of Indian Cinema.
Penguin/Viking, 2005, pp. 258, Rs. 495.00

The Kapoors: The First Family of Indian Cinema by Madhu Jain based on extensive personal interviews the book resembles the films that the great showman Raj Kapoor made.
Penguin/Viking, 2005, pp. 372, Rs. 595.00

Everybody Wants a Hit: 10 Mantras of Success in Bollywood Cinema by Derek Bose while deconstructing some of the myths, seeks to answer the most common and fundamental question "Is there a secret formula to a Bollywood hit".
Jaico Books, 2006, pp. 198, Rs. 195.00

Fiction

The Manticore's Secret by Samit Basu, part two of Game World Trilogy and a sequel to *The Simoquin Prophecies*, which creates a mesmeric landscape bursting with weird and wonderful characters and gripping narrative.
Penguin, 2005, pp. 528, Rs. 295.00

Servant Master Mistress by Boman Desai spans the story from 1910 to 1945 encompassing the tale of the Sanjanas intertwinted with events on the world stage.
IndiaInk/Roli Books, 2005, pp. 424, Rs. 395.00

Hindi Literature

Andhera by Akhilesh, a collection of four novellas explores the conflicting forces in human life today and the power and structural variety of language and creativity.
Rajkamal Prakashan, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 179, Rs. 200.00

Khali Jagah by Gitanjali Shree has at its basic argument is violence which has become such an inseparable part of our day-to-day lives. The novel is a sensitive portrayal of how modern-day violence scatters the lives of innumerable human beings.
Rajkamal Prakashan, 2006, pp. 244, Rs, 250.00

Shabdon Ke Alok Mein by Krishna Sobti is a collection of creative pieces put together between the covers of an attractive volume which neither smacks of the old or imbued with newness but a mellow lanscape of living itself.
Rajkamal Prakashan, 2005, pp. 434, Rs. 550.00

International Relations

The Horseshoe Table: An Inside View of the UN Security Council by Chinmaya R. Gharekhan with a foreword by Dr. Boutros Boutros Ghali takes through the meetings of the Security Council and provides a ringside view of the functioning of this organ which in theory is a vital instrument at the service of the international community.
Pearson/Longman, Delhi, 2006, pp. 328, Rs. 550.00

Literature

Poems and a Novella by A.K. Ramanujan have four works that add yet another dimension to the rich contribution A.K. Ramanujan has mae to Indian and American literature.
Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 330, Rs. 550.00

Political Studies

Forging Power: Coalition Politics in India by Bidyut Chakrabarty examines the renewed emphasis on questions of identity, dominant ideological dispositions, and regional preferences among political formations in India.
Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2006, pp. 280, Rs. 595.00

The State in India: Past and Present edited by Masaaki Kimura and Akio Tanabe offers insights into the relationship between state and society and those between secularity and religiosity in India.
Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 326, Rs. 595.00

Poetry

Early Indian Poetry in nglish: An Anthology 1829-1947 edited by Eunice de Souza is a diverse selection of Indian poetry in English, written in the 19th and early 20th centuries reveals the poets' experimentation with language, theme, and form. Lyrical epics, legends, ballads, and romantic and spiritual poetry, all find place in this interesting collection.
Oxford University Press, 2005, pp. 340, Rs. 475.00

Sociology

Visualizing Indian Women 1875-1947 edited by Malavika Karlekar is a collecton of three hundred rare photographs depicting women's lives.
Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 122, Rs. 1500.00

On those early mornings flinging the grain to the wind?

In another poem, 'Fish with shoots of Taro', the poet describes his struggle against the temptation, during a hunger-strike in jail, to eat a bowl of delicious smelling soup which was placed on the floor of his cell. The savoury scent of the soup cries out to him: "Just take a bite, go on—what is the good of suffering and dying so? … Who is going to know it? Your honour will be safe!" To Huu finally rejects the temptation "and I smile with victory", he concludes the poem. About this experience in jail To Huu remarks with delicate understanding in the interview that "from struggle to surrender there is one millimeter". It is this "millimeter" of courage, a courage with infinite humility and not any sort of grandiose heroism or conceit in victory that marks out the life of To Huu and indeed the whole saga of Vietnam.

To Huu's poetry, beginning with his prison poems, pulsates with another strain, a warm and poignant love for humanity. From the cold solitude of his wintry cell he sang: "Immense the longing for friends—I send the warmth of my affection to the four winds".

An earlier poem composed in 1938 before he was arrested and after he joined the Communist Party, lays bare the humanism of To Huu, not a crackling of dry thorns under the pot of proletarian internationalism though the poet is undoubtedly a proletarian internationalist, but a humanism that is spontaneous, all embracing and full of poetic pathos reminiscent of some of the Negro spirituals. Some lines of this poem are worth quoting:

I bind my heart to the hearts of all men,
Letting my love flow to the furthest horizons.
And my soul be one with the souls of all who suffer…
…Now I am the child of a thousand families,
Younger brother of a thousand humiliated lives,
Elder brother of so many millions of little ones,
Without clothes or rice, wandering without hearth or home.

To Huu's poetry is not all lyricism of the romantic and the critical-realistic current prevalent in much of contemporary Vietnamese poetry. It is also militant revolutionary poetry following Ho Chi Minh's instruction in one of his poems that while the ancients sang of moon, flowers, snow and wind, hills and streams, "… in our days poetry must have steel verses: The poets should form assault teams". To Huu's poetry does not seem to be as hard as "steel verses", and "assault teams", though his life has seen enough of steel and assaults. The nearest we come in this collection to poetry of this harsh type is in "Hue, August '45", in which hailing the August Revolution, he cries out, "Wind, O Wind, become a tempest, become typhoon—Unroll and raise the flag, red—so much blood, so much youth! The poem "The Fighter of Dien Bien Phu" and several poems in homage to Ho Chi Minh and on the struggle in the South may be said to contain some steel. However, one feels that To Huu even in his most revolutionary poems reveals more lyrical passion and poetic hatred than cold steel. For he is essentially a lyric poet. Somebody once defined lyric poetry as a poem "short, simple and sensuous." To Huu has narrated how the man who influenced him in literature during his young days, one Hai Trieu, who kept a small bookshop in Hue (incidentally another man who kept a small bookshop in that city and influenced him in politics at the same time, was Le Duan, now Secretary of the Vietnamese Communist Party) had advised him that there were three things in literature, "the life of the people, not to be too difficult, and not too long". To Huu has in fact followed this precept and his poetry is short, simple, passionate and revolutionary. Short, simple, passionate and revolutionary like the political motto handed down by Ho Chi Minh to his indomitable people, which has inspired To Huu in his poetry viz., "Nothing is more precious than independence and freedom". Commenting on this historic motto To Huu says, "It is concise, clear and understood by all … Independence, freedom—this is the whole of life".■

Loss of Something That Never Was

Vijaya Ramaswamy

FABULOUS GEOGRAPHIES, CATASTROPHIC HISTORIES: THE LOST LAND OF LEMURIA
By Sumati Ramaswamy
First Indian Edition, Permanent Black, 2005, pp.xv + 334, Rs. 695.00

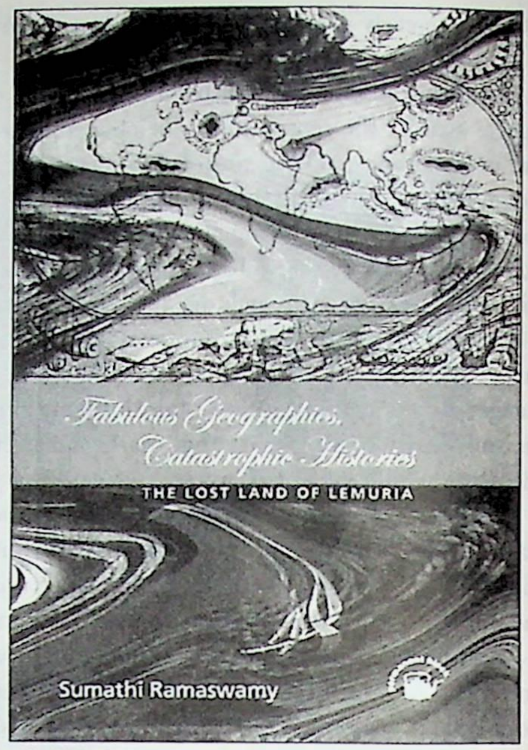
Sumati Ramaswamy has written a brilliant book. It has a breathtaking sweep and a pace that is most unusual for a scholarly work.

The book is about Lemuria – a lost place from a lost time. Human preoccupations with lost continents look back as well as forward. It is a search for Lemuria and the submerged continent of Atlantis. It is also about the wishful longing for a utopia where there is peace, prosperity and the flowering of the finest in human arts and aesthetics. The book is about 'loss' of something that never was. Sumati in fact begins the first chapter with 'placing loss' and loss making. Disenchantment is at the other end of the notion of loss –disenchantment with the present and a constant quest to fill the 'lack' in one's existence. While references to the lost continent of Atlantis finds mention in the writings of Plato, reference to the lost continent of Lemuria seems to have figured for the first time in the western imagination in a brief essay on 'The Mammals of Madagascar' in *The Quarterly Journal of Science* published in the year 1864. The author was Philip Lutley Sclater. Geologists and 'natural historians' led by Alfred R.Wallace who presented a paper on this theme in 1859, spoke about a continental drift and the growing distance between Madagascar and India. For paleo-scientists, paleo-geographers, zoologists, paleo-botanists and naturalists, Lemuria, for which they often used the term Indo-African continent, provided the vital clue to the "missing link" which has haunted evolutionists across Europe. Following the publication of Darwin's *Origin of the Species* in 1859, the German biologist Ernst Haeckel in 1870 formulated what he believed could be a possible answer in the second edition of his book: *The History of Creation.* Haeckel proposed Lemuria as the cradle of human evolution and tentatively suggested that pithecanthropus originated here.

The theosophical movement moved the entire notion of Lemuria away from science and nature to society and culture. The third chapter of the book is about the role of the American occultists (who subsequently formed their headquarters at Adayar in Chennai) in defining the role of Lemuria as the 'cradle of world civilization'. Madam Blavatsky, one of the founders of the Theosophical movement, wrote in her *Isis Unveiled* in 1877 that Lemuria represented the cradle of culture, the home of the "third root race". It was an unequivocal challenge to the scientists' (particularly Darwinian) linear theory of evolution which traced the first ape man to Lemuria. In fact Blavatsky thought that Lemuria and Atlantis could have represented the same lost continent. Humankind was born, not from the ape, but from the Mahatma. Blavatsky clarified, "Every unprejudiced person would prefer to believe that Primeval Humanity had at first an ethereal or, if so preferred, a huge filamentoid, jelly-like form, evolved by Gods…rather than believe him created of the dust of the Earth or from some unknown anthropoid ancestor" (p.58). This notion of Lemuria as the cultural epicenter of humanity found its immediate echo in the Adayar based Theosophist and Nationalist leader Annie Besant. Unlike Blavatsky whose Lemuria seemed to float in some occult space shifting its base constantly, Besant's Lemuria was firmly defined —"Meanwhile, the earth is slowly changing...Southwards the land slowly appeared, stretching from the foot of the Himalayan range, southward to Ceylon, Sumatra, to far off Australia and Tasmania and Easter Island: westwards, till Madagascar and part of Africa emerge, and claiming Norway, Sweden, east and west Siberia and Kamschatka from its predecessor—a vast continent, the huge Lemuria, cradle of the Race in which human intelligence appeared" (p.64).

Chapters four and five of Sumati Ramaswamy's book take up the story of Lemuria at its critical end – Tamilaham. These chapters recall to one's mind the author's earlier work titled *Passions of the Tongue: Language Devotion in Tamil India 1891-1970* which came out in 1997. The chapter begins with the screening of the film 'Kumarikandam' at the Fifth International Conference of Tamil Studies held in Madurai in 1981. The film romanticizes the Tamil past, speaks of the glory of the first two sangams and the subsequent 'catastrophic' disappearance of Kumarikandam due to a great flood which submerged the Tamils with their rich culture and unparalleled literary wealth into the sea. Making the valuable distinction between mere nostalgia and remembrance, Sumati points out that while one mourns the loss of a Utopian land (which never was) remembrance is a way of affirming the Tamil language, culture and identity.

'Flooding History' provides a powerful vision of 'Kadalkol', literally the killer sea which led to the submerging of the enchanting land of Kumarikandam, taking away with it peoples, cultures and histories. Sumati Ramaswamy's book



was completed before the Tsunami destroyed thousands of lives across Asia while homes and peoples were washed away by the killer Tsunami in Tamil Nadu. When reading this chapter one almost feels fey as it were, since her graphic description of the monstrous waves which sank Lemuria seems to have anticipated the catastrophic event that shook the world on the 26 December, 2004.

The penultimate chapter is called 'Mapping Loss' and is literally about the placing of Lemuria in the domain of cartography and map-making. In this context the map in Tamil titled 'The Lost Continent of Lemuria' (reproduced on p.208 from the book *The Spring of the Indus Civilization* by Ramachandran M. and R.Mathivannan published in 1991) is truly fascinating.

Sumati Ramaswamy's journey through the Lemurian phantasmagoria concludes with the critique of loss making by 'rational' Tamils. Neelakanta Sastri, that doyen of Tamil historians, is said to have dismissed the mythology of Kumarikandam as mere "bosh". The author seeks to know, "Does it suggest the impossibility of imagining an ideal state of plenitude and perfection in a colonial condition of subjection and misery?" (p.226). As a result of this sterility, the magic of make believe is compromised time and again by the imperative to demonstrate what '*actually happened*' (sic). Lemuria instead of appearing as a magic moment out of history ends up as a farcical notion, which is neither fantasy nor history.

One puts this book down with the feeling that the voice of the critics of Lemuria is only faintly heard in the book. Lemuria is phoenix like in its reappearance through time and space in the cultural landscape of the Tamils. Dare one presume to imagine the faint note of nostalgia and loss in the author's subjectivity and in the text?

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A Bygone Lifestyle

Meena Bhargava

PRIVATE LIFE OF THE MUGHALS OF INDIA, 1526-1803 A.D.
By R. Nath
Rupa & Co., New Delhi, 2005, pp. 228. Rs. 295.00

The first impression of this book – the title, the cover, colored plates, diagrams and illustrations – is fascinating. It is a description of the private lives of the Mughal emperors but only of a few i.e. Akbar to Shahjahan, with a line or two on Aurangzeb. Although Nath promises to tell us a story for the period 1526-1803, there are rarely any references to the period subsequent to the reign of Shahjahan. Neither does he provide any justification for ending his story in 1803. The Mughal emperors after 1803, even though not as powerful as the earlier Mughals continued to rule till 1857. More importantly, they were as driven as the earlier Mughal emperors by passionate, sexual desires, addictions, intoxications and use of aphrodisiacal drugs for stimulation – a major focus and concern of the book. The Later Mughals should have been at least mentioned in this book, since it is a history of mirth, glory, sumptuousness, sex, passion and an over-indulgence of all these under the Mughal emperors.

Nath claims that his book is different and more authentic as compared to the other modern works on the Mughal harem, based on the accounts of foreign travellers. Depending exclusively on travelogues, these works, he says, have misunderstood and misrepresented the Mughal lifestyle and unduly romanticized it. But Nath, who allegedly, has written on the basis of Persian chroniclers, romanticizes the Mughal lifestyle no less and this is evident throughout in the book. We are compelled to believe or doubt what Nath says, for no bibliography, references or notes are provided in the book. Though the author scantily refers to Abul Fazl and Badauni in some of his descriptions, he mostly talks of "the court historian" of Akbar's reign without specifying which one of them – Abul Fazl, Badauni or Nizamuddin Ahmad Bakshi. These three are popularly known but apart from them, there were several other court historians in Akbar's reign. We are confused as to which one he is referring to. Then the author writes about an English lady who lived in the *zenana* for twelve years and has left a valuable account of the lives of the ladies of the harem. But about who this lady was and which account of hers he is alluding to, we are completely in the dark.

The book gives several details on the different aspects of Mughal style of living i.e. Mughal kitchen and cuisine, *'itr* (perfumes) and incenses, addictions, intoxicants, use of aphrodisiacal drugs, amusements, daily routine and imperial paraphernalia for instance the floor coverings, furnishings, ornaments, clothes and above all their sex life. These details notwithstanding, the book devotes four chapters to the minute, exclusive and exhaustive details of the Mughal harem, the elaborate description of the architectural disposition and institutional organization of the harems i.e. upkeep, maintenance and mechanism (functions) of the harems. Abul Fazl mentions that several thousand women lived in the harem. For instance, in Akbar's harem, there were more than 5000 women. But all women in the harem did not serve a sexual purpose. Hardly five percent of them were queens, concubines and slave girls, who "had access to the king's bed" (p. 19). The rest were maidservants for the general upkeep and maintenance of the harem.

To look after the health and medicinal matters of the ladies of the harem, female *hakims* and female *jarrahs* (surgeons) were attached to the *shafa'-khanah* (hospital) of the palace. The fact that the female *hakims* were trained and equipped to examine, diagnose and cure and that the female *jarrah* could perform surgery is a matter of indisputable pride. Had Nath given even a few details and the names of these women doctors, it would have added to the value of his work.

Another important functionary attached to the harem was a eunuch. Commenting on the role of the eunuchs, Nath gives a detailed description on the "making of the eunuchs" i.e. how young, good-looking boys were castrated, made eunuchs and sold in the market. Besides rendering household services, these boys were also sexually exploited. Many of these eunuchs were made the *khwajasira* (respected elder or *Pir* of the household) or *Nazir* or *Nazir-i-Mahal* or *Nazir-i-Mashkuyah* (superintendent or overall incharge) of the harem quarters. Nath observes that the relationship of the institution of eunuchs with the harem can be traced to ancient civilizations. For instance, in Greece, eunuchs were generally employed as chamberlains or to take charge of the women. They were prized for their fidelity in Persia.

The histories of Persia, India and China are replete with examples indicating the talent of eunuchs for public affairs. It would be worth investigating what Nath says i.e. there are no references to sodomy or other similar sex activities in any ancient Indian literature, which implies that they were obviously introduced in India during the medieval times. Other characteristics such as lesbianism, sadomasochism, sadism, paedophilia and incest were also prevalent during the medieval period.

Nath gives an interesting description of the *phansighar* (execution house). He argues that the harems were architecturally so planned that they could ensure "as much healthy living as segregation and *purdah*" (p. 12). However, despite the sanctity and the secrecy of the harem, the crimes in the palace could not be prevented. To uphold the esteem of the harem, the guilty were secretly executed in a *phansighar* situated in the underground complex of the harem. A wooden beam for the secret execution of the palace criminal was installed in an interior cell of this underground complex. It was directly connected with a deep well and the dead body of the executed persons was dropped into it without anybody's knowledge. The photograph of an underground *phansighar* in the Agra fort appropriately illustrates this vivid description.

The details of the Mughal kitchen, cuisine and etiquette indicate the sumptuous meals of the Mughals. Nath lists a variety of vegetables, fruits, pulses and pickles consumed by the Mughals. It appears that they did not know about potatoes, tomatoes and red chillies.

The spices that they used were classical indigenous spices and ayurvedic medicines that had been used in the Indian kitchens since ancient times.

Fond of *'itr* and incenses, Akbar created a separate department called *khushbu-khanah* (department of perfumery) although Jahangir, in his autobiography, wrote that it was Asmat Begum, mother of Nur Jahan who discovered *'itr* (*Jahangiri-'itr* or '*'itr-i-Jahangiri*) during his reign. Jahangir observed, "my father's nostrils were not gratified with such essences" (p.112). Gradually perfumes became a characteristic feature of the Mughal era. More interesting, however, are the choicest recipes that Nath gives of preparing perfumes and how or in which season they were to be applied for radiance and beauty.

Each chapter devoted to the different aspects of the private life of the Mughal emperors rarely fails to comment on the passion, sexual desires, virility and healthy and youthful looks of the Mughal emperors. In this context may be mentioned the addictions and intoxications that afflicted the Mughal emperors. They were addicted to *araq* (wine) and *ma'jun* (a confection or concoction of opium) and used aphrodisiacal drugs for ecstasy and bliss from sex. It is however believed that Akbar in comparison to the other Mughal emperors was restrained and disciplined and drank only in private. He took opium in the form of a drink called *post*, a preparation of opium, diluted and modified by various admixtures of spices. Presumably, he took it as a tonic for health and as a stimulant rather than for intoxication. Various concoctions of opium like *filuniya* and *'amal* were secretly introduced into the harem and the ladies took to their addiction on a large scale as a succour. Wine was introduced into the harem in the early eighteenth century. *Huqah* and *chilam* were introduced in North India around 1604-05, when Asad Beg, an emissary of Akbar in the court of the Sultan of Bijapur brought it from Deccan, where the Portuguese introduced it. By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, *huqah* was in general use in the *zenana*. *Pan*, though an addiction, was made an institution by the Mughals. In fact, *pan* service became an etiquette and developed into *pan* culture. *Bira* (the style of making *pan* with *supari* (areca nuts) and *laung* (cloves)), if offered by the king to the courtier, was seen as a mark of royal favour. *Pan* offering thus became a token of respect and goodwill.

Amusements and pastimes for both the ladies of the harem and the Mughal emperors were plenty. Several entertainments for the ladies included *Mina Bazaar* or the day of the fancy *bazaar* on the third feast day of every month, story-telling and *gap-bazi* (gossiping), puppet shows (exclusively managed by women for the inmates of the harem), *chaupar* or *chandal-mandal*, *ganjifa* or playing cards. Many ladies of the harem, apart from keeping themselves busy with embroidery, sewing and dress making, were also engaged in calligraphy and copying the Quran, which was considered to be a religiously meritorious activity. These ladies were also educated, possessed literary tastes, were fond of composing verses and a number of them wrote under the pen name of *makhfi* (concealed). Another artistic engagement for these ladies was instrumental music, particularly their talent in playing *dilruba*. For the Mughal emperors, the favourite pastimes were hunting, watching animal fights and *ishq-bazi* (pigeon-flying).

The activities of the Mughal kings, both official and private, were recorded by experienced and expert *waqia-navis* (event-writers) and approved by the emperor before being made public. We know these official records as *Yad-Dasht* (Memorandums).

Nath tries to be gender sensitive in the concluding paragraph of his book but rather unconvincingly. For instance, we have no idea what he means by the statement "a woman being a woman could not bear it" (p. 214). Whether he is being sympathetic or indifferent or critical, there is no clue or indication. He presents women as sex symbols throughout the book, despite the fact that he acknowledges himself that women of the harem were educated, had literary sense, artistic and music talent apart from of course being "attached" or having "access to the bed of the king", a phrase that he repeats umpteen times in the book. There were many women in the harem and Nur Jahan could be an example, who broke the male forte, were dynamic and dominating, strong-willed and determined and master-minded several events and administrative decisions. Even while writing about the private lives of the Mughal emperors, some space could have been provided to the other attributes of these women rather than merely focusing on them as sex objects and how they satiated the passionate and sexual desires.

Written simplistically, with the most obvious details explained with utter monotony, the book has been written for the lay and general reader. Nonetheless, for the students of social and cultural history, the book may provide important clues, which can be further investigated and researched upon.■

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An Unusual Case Study

Gillian Wright

PILGRIMS OF LOVE: THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF A GLOBAL SUFI CULT
By Pnina Werbner
Oxford University Press, Karachi, pp. 348, Rs. 550.00

Zindapir, so called because he was still alive when he was respected as a Sufi master, makes an unusual case study for anthropologist Pnina Werbner. Since so much is written about the Talibanization of the ranks of the Pakistan army, it should not be so surprising that other Islamic trends grew from there too. In this case a Sufi cult arose around a man who served as a tailoring contractor to the 11th Baluch Regiment. Still attached to the army in the late nineteen-forties, his first miracle was the cancellation of the transfer of a major from Gujrat to Baluchistan, and his second was to have the uniforms for the regimental brass band perfectly stitched and pressed overnight in time to take part in a brass band competition.

Werbner refers to such miracles as having an "impeccable line of authorities", a phrase reminiscent of the way Hadith of the Prophet are authenticated. And to believers, Zindapir and the stories about him are elevated to a level where there can be no doubt, only certainty. Werbner herself is more than sympathetic to the cult, and her own personal beliefs are made clear in her acknowledgements where she writes, "Zindapir allowed me to share in his divine grace."

A sympathetic attitude and a genuine desire to learn are better tools to understand a spiritual movement than unmitigated scepticism but for those outside the circle of devotees, some doubt, as in the case of all guru figures, is natural, and Werbner also attempts to keep her research balanced.

After leaving the army Zindapir showed determination and a sense of mission. He took to the wilderness around Kohat in NWFP, in an area inhabited by dacoits, and, according to his followers, by the direct command of the Prophet himself, established a base there. In 1951 when he first arrived, he lived in a cave which is still preserved. Subsequently he built what Werbner refers to, rather confusingly, as "a lodge". The word has various connotations in English which do not fit well with the "khanqah" which it must have been. Throughout she also refers to Zindapir as a saint, rather than a Sufi. This term is also loosely bandied about in India for those Hindu ascetics who are known as sants. But this word too should be used cautiously, the original words in South Asian languages always being preferable.

The "lodge" developed. Volunteers provided free labour. The government provided free electricity and water. A langar was begun which provided free and plentiful food throughout the year. A mosque was built in an eccentric semi-Rajput style with pencil-like minarets which Werbner's innocence of South Asian and Muslim architectural tradition finds perfect. Orchards flourished on what had been barren land. An urs was instituted in the memory of Hazrat Muhammad Qasim, Zindapir's own pir who belonged to the reformist Naqshbandi sect of Sufism and died in his khanqah in the Murree hills in 1943. This urs became the central annual event of activities of the khanqah and attracted thousands of devotees.

Up till now the story follows a familiar pattern. Free labour for building mosques, temples and gurudwaras or for service of a spiritual master, is an old tradition. The langar can be found at Sufi shrines, at temples and is one of the most important aspect of Sikhism since the time of the gurus. Urs are celebrated at countless Sufi shrines and the similarities between Hindu worship and that at Sufi shrines is well known. Werbner argues that these traditions spring not from Hinduism, but from beyond South Asia, from medieval Europe and the Near-East. I myself feel strongly that both are true as there were never any barriers to influence and everything has always influenced everything else, although those who have a reason try to prove that influences only came one way.

There are, however, two very special aspects to this book which make it more than a restating of the familiar. The first is Werbner's painstaking collation of information about Zindapir and his disciples and devotees during his lifetime and afterwards, including many interviews. She also examines the finest and most esoteric elements of their theology with intricate diagrams. She concentrates on the relationships between the pir and followers detailing their beliefs and experience and setting it in the wider context of Islamic concepts such as Haj and sacrifice. She closely documents the urs held at the "lodge".

The second aspect is her research into how his followers have spread the word about him abroad, and to Britain in particular, where a mirror "urs" is held in Birmingham.

The man who was Zindapir's principal disciple in the UK at the time of her research was literally a towering figure. Sufi Sahib stood well over six feet tall and had served, she

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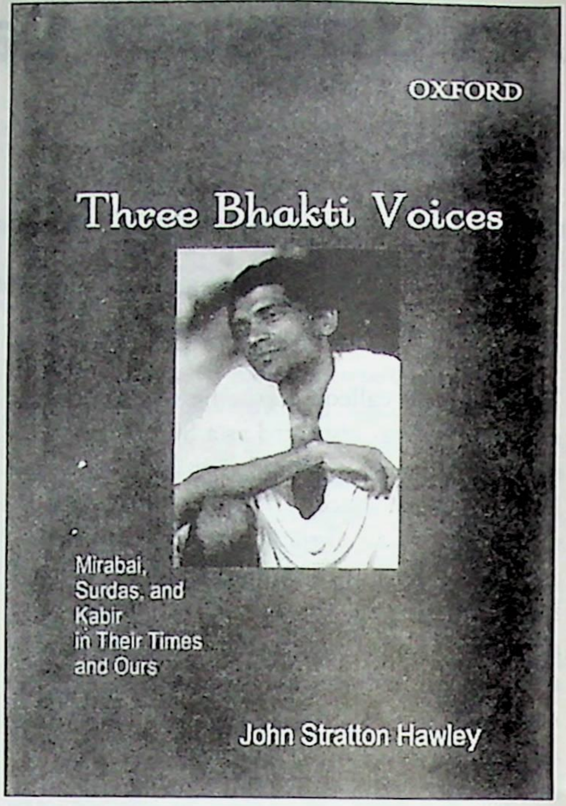
surmises, as a subedar in the Indian army before independence, spending three years in a German prisoner of war camp. It is strange that having spent so much time with him and his followers she does not know for sure what his rank and regiment were. Sufi Sahib first met Zindapir in 1945 in Abbotabad, and continued to serve the next seventeen years in the Pakistan army, while at the same time helping to construct Zindapir's lodge in Kohat. Knowing hardly any English, he then migrated to Britain as a labourer where he worked in the iron foundries of the Midlands. He had a very tough life, and it shows in his rather forbidding features.

"Living in the land of infidels", as a monthly Pakistani magazine put it, did not restrict Sufi Sahib. Spiritual growth is by its nature intangible, but like his pir Sufi Sahib has been highly pragmatic and practical. The Golden Hillock complex he set up from derelict terraced houses now has a community centre financed by the Birmingham Metropolitan Council, a centre for the disabled, an employment centre, a training centre for IT, typewriting and English language courses. All this apart from a school, a Darululoom and a large mosque where each chandelier in the main hall cost 75,000 pounds. This success demonstrates the way migrants from Pakistan maintain their links with their original home and their original beliefs, and also about the freedom to practise their beliefs and build upon them in British society. For all its faults, it remains the most liberal of western

Listening to 'The Three Bhakti Voices'

Suman Keshari

THREE BHAKTI VOICES: MIRABAI, SURDAS AND KABIR IN THEIR TIMES AND OURS
By John Stratton Hawley
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 439, Rs. 695.00



If one did not read the preface quite carefully, one is not likely to realize that the volume under review contains articles published over a span of thirty years. (The essay on the 'Sur tradition' was first published in 1979). Hawley has put these diverse essays in such a way that a clear consistency of the concerns and argument characterizes his treatment of the 'Three Bhakti Voices'—so distinct from each other.

Hawley's book firmly rooted in careful reading of the manuscripts, questions many a commonsensical position prevalent among the scholars of Bhakti poetry. The standard historical schemata prevalent in the university departments of Hindi literature divide the Bhakti poets into mutually exclusive, in fact, antagonistic categories of the devotees of the formless God (Nirguna) and those devoted to some incarnation of God (Saguna), these categories are also supposed to be indicative of the orientations and worldviews, one being radical and the other being the orthodox. Having internalized this categorization, the critics and scholars pick and choose their favourites and not so favourites.

Hawley is clearly puzzled by the very neatness of the above classification, which simply leaves out the overlapping of views and is incapable of taking note of the complexities and the ambiguities of the poetic sensibilities. In fact, the continuities between Kabir, Surdas and Mirabai outweigh the contrasts, which are supposed to be there, as Kabir had a rather contemptuous attitude to the idea of incarnation, while Surdas and Mirabai were devoted to Krishna. But as it happens quite often in academics, once 'established' the schema starts 'dictating' the history itself. So, in spite of facing the 'continuities' constantly, scholars and students almost force themselves to privilege the contrasts over such continuities. Hawley's strength lies in taking his puzzlement to its logical end and that not in just a polemical manner, he takes the arduous way of going back to the hard evidences instead of taking recourse to argumentative nit-pricking. And, hard evidence in this case is the vast reservoir of the manuscripts. Incidentally, Hawley's obsession with manuscripts is indeed inspiring and of course to some it could be irritating as well. Those who are in a hurry to create 'exciting', yet 'fixed' images of the Bhakta poets like Kabir and Mirabai are not going to be exactly happy with Hawley informing them of the existence of 'many Kabirs' and of unavailability of Mirabai's poems in contemporary manuscripts.

Coming back to the Nirguna-Saguna divide, Hawley goes back to the manuscripts with the question, " and to what degree can we see a clear distinction being made between Nirguna and Saguna paths in the Bhakti kal itself? Can one find it in the writings that emerge from north India in the 'classical period'—fifteenth to seventeenth centuries—or must one assume that it was the result of the sectarian definitions that grew strong as the centuries passed?" He has good reason to sound a much needed note of caution, " If the former, there is no reason to question the rubrics that we have come to accept in describing the religious poetics of the Bhakti kal. If the latter, we will have to learn to use a good deal more caution—and perhaps a good deal more imagination than we have done in the past"(p.72).

It is with such 'caution' and 'imagination' that he points out the continuities in the religious poetics of Kabir, Sur and Mirabai, particularly with reference to the emotion of love and the idea of 'longing'. Such 'longing' characterizes Mirabai's sensibility, naturally. But then, the Kabir and the Sur poetry or 'tradition' also abounds in the same emotion and the same longing. It is almost a convention to reconstruct the emotion of love from the woman's point of view. Reading this convention in a stimulating way, Hawley brings out both moving and problematic aspects of the poetic sensibility that 'knew' clearly, that the 'gender of longing' has to be feminine!

Hawley traces the evolution of the three Bhakti Voices over a period of centuries. He reiterates the fact of 'the poetic seal' of any individual poet working as a kind of umbrella for many people seeking to articulate their own experiences and longings in the Bhakti voices. This reviewer had a chance experience of this phenomenon. A woman Bhakta while singing her own composition, used the name 'Mira' as that of the author! Her reason for this 'audacity' was indeed enlightening—'Radha was his privileged companion, while Mira had to find him through her poems. In this way, I am also like her, in fact I am she—Mira!'

Hawley deals with the fraught and sensitive question of the idea of author and authority in the Bhakti tradition quite thought-provokingly. Be it Surdas or Kabir or Mirabai, his concern is to trace the evolution of a text and its 'authority' in the sense of authenticity as well as in the sense of the moral impact and he works both ways—moving with ease from the earliest manuscripts to contemporary performances. He interrogates the 'givens' with passion and in this passionate task his forte of course remains the poetry of Surdas! It has been a 'given' for quite some time that Surdas was 'deeply influenced' with, in fact 'guided and directed' by the theology and philosophy of Vallabhacharya. Basing his argument on the readings of the manuscripts of various collections of Sur poems, and of the anthologies, particularly the Fatehpur manuscript of 1582 (the earliest extant collection of the Brajbhasha poetry), Hawley passionately argues for the poetic autonomy of Surdas: "Vallabha has been inserted between Sur and the audience of Brajvasis that had apparently gathered around his poems" (p.188). In other words here is a case of a poet being appropriated in the power structure of a religious sect, his poetic sensibility undergoing a transformation in the process.

Hawley works out his conclusions on the basis of strictest textual criticism and reminds the reader, " Dated and dateable manuscripts reveal the evolution of the text in question. Almost invariably the process shows that the text is actually a series of texts"(p.2). This

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evolution also impacts the 'life' of the poet as preserved and recollected in the popular imagination. Comparing the medieval anthologies and hagiographies with the modern reconstructions of the life of Mirabai, Hawley points out that the Mira in the *Amar Chitra Katha* version of her life, 'turns to her divine husband', "only after fulfilling her household duties". The courageous and bold Mira of the medieval hagiography like the 'Bhaktamal' and its commentary, is turned into a conformist, middle class wife of the modern era!

Hawley is generally not given to careless 'declarations'; he is quite particular about his method, and treads with caution while making any observation. It is however sad and amusing at the same time to hear him say with regard to the vexed question of Kabir's relation with Ramananda, "I have to side with the lower caste critics who think the connection between Ramananda and Kabir was just a pious invention, a way to deny Kabir his roots"(p.272).

It is sad because the very idea of the 'roots' of a certain kind is a contemporary given, certainly not enough to dismiss the simple fact that almost all the medieval sources accept some kind of connection between Kabir and Ramananda. It is amusing because the same Nabhadas who is a very reliable source and authority for the 'courageous image' of Mirabai, becomes part of the project of denying 'Kabir his roots' by mentioning the connection between Kabir and Ramananda! Interestingly, Hawley himself notes the fact of Fatehpur manuscript having a 'Vaishnavised' voice of Kabir!

This question of the connection between Kabir and Ramananda is indeed a vexed one and by far an open one. A scholar as competent as Hawley could do better in this regard than to fall prey to the easy way of 'siding with' the fashionable politics of identity and difference, which simplistically reduces the past into a battleground of the contestants of the present, thus actually denying it the much needed autonomy from the present. Some could in the same vein argue for siding with those who are in search of 'purer' roots of the Indian nation and consider Indian secularism nothing but a 'pious invention'!

But, happily, it is probably the only place, where Hawley lets go of his 'good deal more caution and good deal more imagination'.

It is indeed a delight to go through the provoking argument couched in evocative prose. The author knows not only the area of his specialization, but has an empathic understanding of the Indian tradition as well as the Indian present. His translations are simply superb, and indicate his grasp of the content and form of the material at hand. His is not 'specialist's work' only, but a sensitive investigation of the three Bhakti voices " in their times and ours." Far from being frozen in 'their times' these voices speak of, and in our times as well and the volume under review is an attempt to listen to them and an attempt to speak to them as well.■

Suman Keshari is a poet and a short story writer. She researches on bhakti literature.

Books In Brief

WINE WISDOM: BUYING AND DRINKING WINE IN INDIA
By Magandeep Singh
Penguin India, Delhi, pp.230, Rs. 250.00

FOOD IS HOME: THE LITTLE BOOK OF ITALIAN COOKING
By Sarjano
Penguin India, Delhi, pp.269, Rs. 250.00

Food and drink have the most peculiar nature. Subject to the vagaries of climate, storage and preparation conditions and available ingredients, they are infinitely malleable. Depending on what the tongue has grown up with and what comes before, after and during the sampling of a dish, the experience varies. At the same time, cuisine is the subject of the most inflexible judgements. Social superiority and inferiority are often determined by the "appropriateness" of responses to these bearers of culture. In India at least, and, I suspect, in many other countries as well, the introduction of new cuisine traditionally associated in the western world with "high" culture drives the need for prescription. How to judge a wine; how to handle it; and, most importantly, how to talk about it: an initiation into a world of secrets and an entirely new vocabulary.

At one level, Magandeep Singh's *Wine Wisdom* falls into this category of prescriptive work. But to leave the book's description at that would do the author an injustice. This compact, detailed and friendly little work is an excellent way to enter a world of experience that is, by and large, unfamiliar to an Indian, without the cultural contortions that often seem so artificial. For example, Singh encourages his readers to invent their own vocabulary to describe various taste sensations—words that relate to their own experience. Thus, we might talk about *jamuns* instead of blackberries, and *nellikaa* instead of gooseberries. At the same time, it is necessary to understand both the vocabulary and information about wine—labels, characteristics, storage and serving. Singh talks about both areas with a surprising level of detail in such a slender volume. He provides the orthodox views on, for example, labels, *and* the qualifications and outright contrarian views, leaving it up to the reader with the information necessary to develop his or her own approach. And this is the true utility of *Wine Wisdom*: it provides novices with the concepts to build their own approaches for enjoying and appreciating wine.

If Singh's book is a carefully planned, structured work, Sarjano's *Food is Home*, is the opposite. It reads more like a blog than a book: first-person and chatty and not particularly concerned with structure or grammar. The style is, perhaps, a little too self-consciously the hand-waving mad Italian whom we see in the movies. But, as with *Wine Wisdom*, Sarjano encourages the reader to think creatively about how to approach Italian cooking. Starting from the ground up—the preparation of different kinds of pasta, and pizza base—the author provides options to experiment with various ingredients, inviting the reader to understand and participate in the creative process of cooking. With his extensive experience of India-he was in charge of the Osho ashram in Pune for two decades—Sarjano's book is certainly adapted to Indian taste.

Rishi Srinivasa Iyengar

In Search of the Inner Himalaya

Bill Aitken

SEARCH FOR DESTINY: A SPIRITUAL ADVENTURE IN THE HIMALAYAS
By Stephen Knapp
Black & White, New Delhi, 2005, pp.238, Rs. 395.00

HIMALAYAN MYSTICISM: SHIVA'S DISC TO CUT ASUNDER AND OPEN THE MYSTIC HEART
By Ralph Nataraj
Metavision Publishing, The Netherlands, 2004, pp.191, price not stated.

Spirituality, unlike religion with its collective proscriptions, connotes an essentially free, solitary state, immaculate in being beyond belief, expression and morality. Neither of the two books under review entirely avoid the trap of endorsing the popular belief that the Himalaya and Ganga are suitable symbols of the spiritual state because of their majestic and aloof grandeur. However, since mystics assert that evidence of the spirit can be found equally in the desert, the marketplace and in the most ordinary of human hearts, there can be no intrinsic merit in seeking out a Himalayan cave.

At Lucknow railway station an old Sufi once defined spirituality as: "When two become one". India`s startling range of doctrines and methods to find that oneness appeals to foreign freethinkers often because of the erotic possibilities inherent in certain Vaishnava and Tantric schools whose teachings hint at exciting options in the quest for the spiritual which in the Semitic scriptural perception of reality remain strictly out of bounds. Neither of these books pander to the *Kama Sutra* level of attracting readership and both are insightful expositions by foreign enthusiasts of Hinduism`s remarkable open house policy that allows for recognition of the experience of union between lovers – physical and otherwise — as genuine emulation of life`s ultimate spiritual oneness. It ought to be a source of pride in the modern world that the rapturous love of Radha and Krishna (that would be grounds for the adulterous wife to be publicly stoned in some societies) has always been acknowledged by certain schools to be divinely inspired. Surely this daring insight is unique evidence of Hinduism`s mature understanding of what truly constitutes the spiritual.

The danger of enthusiasts is that they often misinterpret the symbolic nature of images that are intended to arouse our psychic understanding rather than the corporeal senses. *Search for Destiny* is a kind of mystical thriller written quite well by Stephen Knapp who is an American disciple of the Gauriya school of Bengal, revolutionary both in carrying the ecstatic teachings of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu beyond the Kala Pani and in demonstrating that a convert (dikshit) Vaishnav can be born outside Bharat Varsha's emotionally sacrosanct confines. The book is subtitled *A Spiritual Adventure in the Himalayas* when in fact it is more of a psychic revelation wherein an American seeker tells of how disillusioned with his career as a rock musician he came to Rishikesh and destiny not only arranged for him to find his guru but fulfil a prophecy.

Stephen either unaware or ignorant of the realities of village life in Garhwal "where children go hungry at noon" (to quote Ruskin Bond) is undeterred by the leanness of the land and has the guru-shishya relationship develop along predictably idealized lines with the bonus of the guru`s demonstration of psychic phenomena powerful enough to overcome those Asuric forces of a malignant opponent from Ladakh (a province the author imagines to be outside India!) Couched in terms of the lore of Vaikunth and thus irritating to a rationalist, the physical improbabilities are described with a skill and expository flair that might do credit to the inventors of Harry Potter and Frodo Baggins.

In contrast to Knapp's smooth narrative Ralph Nataraj's *Himalayan Mysticism* seems disjointed by virtue of its short and often pithy reflections on the agonies and ecstasies of treading an inner path. However it follows on from the first book in the sense that here we have not the searchings but the findings of a young foreigner who evidently has profited from his understanding of Kashmir Saivism's deep regard for the Goddess principle. Subtitled *Shiva's disc to cut asunder and open the mystic heart* allowance has to be made for a quaint Dutchman's turn of phrase. Cast in the style of Krishnamurti's *Commentaries on Living* this handsomely produced book presents some sixty " satsang" reflections delivered in the Generation Next mode.

The author is profound, hilarious, shocking, compassionate, trendy and bizarre by turns but never bitter or censorious . Like Stephen Knapp he can be naïve about ground realities in the Himalaya and swallows uncritically talk of "Vedic Raj Ram" (whatever that means). Ralph`s take on Kashmir Saivism is subjective, contemporary and wonderfully affirmative. Tantra he insists is a discipline that honours women and celebrates the life force. His advice though sometimes erratic and even contradictory (not helped by the limitations of English to do justice to the spiritual state) is essentially pragmatic. If you are as earnest as the author is in following the path of yoga, you must choose a living teacher because "Dead gurus don't kick ass!" Often his style of discourse reminds of Pirsig`s classic *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* with its emphasis on gumption. To this Ralph adds his own brand of joy. He calls his approach " the Path of Yoga, Beauty and Delight" and it is a welcome sign in a young westerner that he does not distort the arcane meaning of Tantra to suit any hidden hedonistic agenda.

The delight the reader experiences in hearing this eclectic Dutchman sound off about his good feelings for the universe is "something else" (as he would say.) On every level positive and stimulating comments emanate from him and a sampling of his enlightened squibs is the simplest way to convey that in Ralph Nataraj we appear to have a rare, modern example of someone "spiritually cool," weaving a magic carpet of love: " If the divine didn`t have desires we would not be here./ Every man comes out of a woman but forgets to pay tribute. / If you want to enter Platform 9 ¾ you must shake your hips./ Our churches and mosques are beautiful buildings but nothing particularly divine happens./ It is not philosophy that will come to the aid of mankind but divine madness, dancing in ecstasy. If you build a house make the doorway low so you always remember to bow to the Great Architect of the Universe./ Don't walk all your life behind a farting camel: climb up and take the reins."■

Bill Aitken is author of *Divining the Deccan* and *Sri Sathya Sai Baba: A Life.*

Music Galore

Partho Datta

FORM IN INDIAN MUSIC: A STUDY IN GHARANAS
By Chetan Karnani
Rawat Publications, Jaipur and New Delhi, 2005, pp.248, Rs.495.00

RASA YATRA: MY JOURNEY IN MUSIC
By Mallikarjun Mansur.
Translated by Rajsekhar Mansur
Roli Books, Delhi, 2005, pp.144, Rs.295.00

INVENTING THE SAROD: A CULTURAL HISTORY
By Adrian McNeil
Seagull, Calcutta, 2004, pp.277, Rs.575.00

VISHWA MOHAN BHATT: THE MUSICAL MESSIAH
By Kanchan Mathur
D.K.Printworld, New Delhi, 2005, pp.132, price not mentioned.

Chetan Karnani is India's foremost critic of Hindustani classical music. In 1976 Sangam Books (Orient Longman) published *Listening to Hindustani Music,* a collection of wide-ranging essays on musicians, musical genres and music theory. Over the years this little book has become a classic. One person who took great pride in this achievement was the late Sujit Mukherjee of Orient Longman who was the first to grasp the potential of compiling Karnani's scattered essays into a book. (He also suggested the same to Satyajit Ray and that was how *Our Films Their Films* was born). I bought my copy many years ago at Anil Arora's *Bookworm* in Connaught Place and dip into it frequently for inspiration and entertainment, constantly marvelling how Karnani's perspicacity refuses to age.

Karnani's book remains distinctive for many reasons. First is his avowed scepticism. This is not a value easily associated with Indian artists and critics, most of whom are closet conservatives and hagiographers. In his book Karnani delights in puncturing the humbug that masquerades as avuncular advice and which seems a speciality of pretentious music critics. Even more hard-hitting are his wicked observations on the musical delusions of famous maestros like Omkarnath and Kumar Gandharva. In the early 1970s Karnani was championing through his essays vocalists like Mallikarjun Mansur and Basavraj Rajguru who were not very popular in North India. His essays on Amir Khan and Nikhil Bannerjee are enlightened and sophisticated. The essay 'Ravi Shankar and the West' is a model of its kind which tackles sensibly a rather tricky subject. Karnani is also rare among music critics since he does not resort to opaque musical grammar to establish aesthetic points. All critical assessments are made sensibly with reference to published recordings available in the public domain. The curious can cross-check Karnani's pronouncements and form their own opinion. This is refreshing since music critics are notorious for boasting about unique music occasions, to most of which the less privileged *janata* have no access. Finally, reading Karnani is always a reassuring experience because he seems to put into words what one has felt intuitively.

Unfortunately this book remained out of print for more than twenty years. Except occasionally at old booksellers or the Sunday book bazaar, copies were hard to come by. Meanwhile the era of the great maestros seemed to be drawing to a close and musical cultures too changed rapidly. Thanks to a growing market for music generally, old recordings of past masters began to be available aplenty (Amir Khan, Nikhil Bannerjee, Mallikarjun Mansur etc.). The need for intelligent guides like Karnani's became imperative as the circulation of this music grew. A second expanded edition was brought out in 1999 by Arnold Associates. But this was a minor disaster. The production and copy-editing were sloppy and there were too many typos ("Mallikarjun" became unpardonably "Mulkarjan"). Karnani's expanded text while retaining the core of the earlier book had also become top heavy. In an effort to be comprehensive he had included too many musicians, most of whom were not worth writing about anyway. Karnani's informed opinion is always worth serious engagement, but now with the net cast so wide his critical edge had become rather blunt. As a result some of the charm of the first edition seemed to have worn off.

Form in Indian Music is another attempt to give the same book a new life. It is therefore very much old wine in a new bottle. But this time round there is a more reliable publisher, the production is infinitely better and there are fewer typos (though at one place "Mulkarjan" again makes an unexpected appearance!). Karnani has reset his text, added new material and organized the book thematically around gharanas. The long chapter on Khyal incorporates the valuable earlier accounts with up-to-date material on the newer vocalists (including discography). Two new additions are chapters on Dhrupad and the Tabla. The penultimate chapter 'New Approaches to Indian Music' is an extended review of recent books published on music. There are many interesting tidbits woven around the skeleton of the old chapters and some sharp insightful observations reminiscent of the first edition. But somehow I got the impression that Karnani has mellowed. Kesarbai Kerkar had been given the short shrift in 1976 as "cold and austere in her approach". In 2005 she gets two pages to herself and the occasional pat on the back. Krishna Rao Shankar Pandit too had been dismissed summarily as someone who "mistakes technique for value, and yet his uncultivated voice is gracefully tolerated by his naïve admirers". This evaluation too has been quietly dropped in the latest edition. However, for all those without access to Karnani's first edition, this version will fill in eminently as a very adequate substitute.

Mallikarjun Mansur's account of his life, *Rasa Yatra*, first published in Kannada in 1981 has finally arrived in an excellent English translation, by his son Rajsekhar Mansur the eminent vocalist. Carefully edited with a fresh introduction, annotations and an afterword that brings the story of Mansur's life till his death from lung cancer in 1992, this is an extraordinary and unusual story. Extraordinary, since Mansur came from a very humble rural background and although hugely talented made it to the top by sheer perseverance and industry. And unusual because memoirs by great musicians are so rare. The only comparable account by a contemporary vocalist is Agra maestro Vilayat Hussain Khan's *Sangeetagyon ke Sansmaran* published in 1959 by the Sangeet Natak Akademi, Delhi. The English translation of Mansur's memoirs is a valuable addition to the scattered material on his life which includes S.Kalidas's memorable TV interview (now available as a Doordarshan VCD), Sadanand Kanvalli's short biography in English (Prasaranga, Karnataka University, Dharwad, 1992), two films by Pragya Parashar (Films Division) and Nandan Kudiyadi (Ministry of External Affairs) and various other memoirs and essays published in Kannada, Marathi, Hindi and English. Dedicated followers have also recorded Mansur systematically since the 1980s and there are hundreds of hours of his music available in Dharwad, Bombay, Calcutta (Sangeet Research Academi), Delhi, Bhopal (Bharat Bhavan) and elsewhere.

Although Mansur was highly regarded as a vocalist throughout the country it was only from the late 1970s that he truly achieved national renown. Honours were heaped upon him and he even found indulgent fans in cities like Calcutta well known for its devotion to Bade Ghulam Ali Khan and Amir Khan. Although sceptics from other gharanas dismissed this phenomenon as mere good fortune since Mansur fitted the bill of a venerable musician in the concert circuit, it was soon obvious that his genius had necessitated a revision and revaluation not only of vocalism in the 1980s but of the decades immediately following independence. Mansur's later career certainly established his name among the handful of musicians who today find place in India's pantheon. His performing life remained closely tied to the flowering of the Jaipur-Atrauli gharana in Maharashtra. After Kesarbai Kerkar, it is thanks to Mansur, that the singing style and repertoire made famous by founder Alladiya Khan achieved wide popularity among classical aficionados. This popularity continues to grow even after Mansur's death more than a decade ago. Well-known vocalists from Maharashtra like Kishori Amonkar, Padma Talwalkar, Ulhas Kashalkar, Shruti Sadolikar Katkar and Ashwini Bhide Deshpande all owe primary allegiance to the same Jaipur-Atrauli tradition.

Mallikarjun was born on December 31, 1910 in Mansur, Karnataka, a village named after local saint Al Mansur. The family name was Yerihakkalas and they belonged to the Lingayat sect. As a child he followed his elder brother into

a career of acting and singing and joined a touring theatre company where his talent for singing was spotted by Neelkanthbua Alurmath, a well-known singer from the Gwalior gharana. Mansur was accepted as a disciple and spent many years in his guru's home in Miraj learning the ropes of khyal music in the guru-shishya tradition. As a young man he became a popular concert artist recording his first 78 rpm for HMV in 1933. In 1935 a new chapter of his life began when Manji Khan accepted him as a disciple in Bombay and his advanced training in the Jaipur-Atrauli style began in earnest. The early death of his second guru was a devastating blow and he sought out and was accepted as a disciple of Bhurji Khan, Manji Khan's younger brother. In his autobiography Mansur writes that his *talim* came to an end with the death of his third guru in 1950.

Mansur's public career, as later commentators pointed out, was varied and went through many ups and downs. He was a music director for two Kannada films. Although later appointed an advisor to AIR, in the 1950s he felt impelled to protest the arbitrary fixation of grades devised by bureaucratic committees. In the 1970s he helped put together the Music Faculty for Karnatak University at Dharwad and invited fellow musicians like Gangubai Hangal, Basavraj Rajguru and Sanghameshwar Gurav to join as teachers. His primary vocation though remained steadfastly that of a vocalist. In the late 1960s HMV brought out two L.Ps which now have the status of classics. The first has a recording of Bahaduri Todi and Gaud Malhar. The second has Jaunpuri, Jait Kalyan and Bihari. In the 1980s *Music Today* brought out many other recordings. On his death in 1992, HMV issued a four-volume pack of live recordings from the personal collection of R.H.Bengeri, a close friend and follower which is a collector's item.

One of the most interesting chapters in the autobiography is about the important musicians whom Mansur heard throughout his career. Other than Alladiya Khan and his two sons who were his gurus, Mansur mentions Faiyaz Khan of the Agra Gharana as one of the greats he has heard. He is all praise for Kesarbai Kerkar's virtuosity but felt that her music did not touch the heart. There are some legendary stories about Kesarbai's competitiveness the brunt of which a much younger Mansur had to bear but which do not find mention in the book. Rajsekhar Mansur has added a detailed account on the important concerts that his father gave and his analysis and commentary incorporates much valuable musical material. There are some fine photographs. But what is inexplicable is that there is no portrait of guru Manji Khan who Mansur claimed had given him a second life in music.

Music historians in India have long felt the need to write the social history of music. Adrian McNeil's account of the sarod is very much in this tradition and for that reason very welcome. For many years now beginning with ethno-musicologists in American Universities in the 1970s a steady trickle of sophisticated studies of mostly India's classical instrumental tradition has come out from prestigious University Presses in the West. In this genre Allyn Miner's *Sitar and Sarod in the 18th and 19th Centuries* (Indian edition, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1997) set a precedent that combined detailed research with musical insight. Indians too have written important if more omnibus accounts, particularly notable being the pioneering work of the late B.C.Deva who was closely associated with the Sangeet Natak Akademi.

McNeil draws creatively on contemporary social theory. Mainstream historians will recognize that the title of his book takes inspiration from E.J.Hobsbawm's famous collection *Invention of Tradition*. It is precisely for this reason that McNeil's book will find a ready audience among all those who are also interested in the wider cultural history of modern India. Hopefully attempts like McNeil's will encourage a more prominent place for music in cultural studies in the Indian academe which traditionally admits only architecture and painting, and of late film only reluctantly (and dance not at all).

In his introduction the author explains that he has tried to understand the history of the instrument at three interrelated levels. The first is the production of sound from within the instrument itself. The second level is the kind of music that the performer cajoles out of the instrument. The third level is concerned with the larger aesthetic convention within which this musical endeavour is produced. McNeil writes that "focusing only on the organology and material culture of the instrument, is to ignore any number of other coexisting historical strands…therefore along with a study of the history of the morphology and material culture…there is also an exploration of the forms of patronage,..musicians, the history of the sound and musical voice of the instrument, the history of its music making and its etymology"(p.5). This is indeed a wide-ranging agenda that also doubles as a critique of the rather narrow approach of music historians in the recent past.

While the antiquity of Indian lutes are acknowledged by all historians, the sarod as we know it today has strong associations with the Afghan (Kabuli) rabab, a folk instrument. The urbane veneer of Amjad Ali Khan and his star sons Aman and Ayan today may seem far removed from their ancestors, sturdy tribals from Afghanistan, primarily horse breeders and occasional rabab players who emigrated over many hundreds of years to the Gangetic valley in search of livelihood and patronage. McNeil shows how the musical development of the classical sarod took an important turn when this vibrant tradition began to access and seek out the genre of music associated with ancient veena playing in North India, whose traditional practitioners were the Senias i.e. families purported to have descended from the family of Tansen. Sometime in the late nineteenth century the sarod also imbibed the more popular genre of *khyal* into its music making way for many innovations in its technique and performance. McNeil over two long chapters has traced in detail the currents of Afghan emigration to the North Indian heartland, the history of the various families, the smaller kingdoms and principalities where they sought refuge and changes that they brought to the instrument. There are detailed family charts and also a careful collation of teaching lineages. Later in the book, McNeil also shows how the sarod has become the centre of a contentious extra-musical agenda which has sought to hijack one possible originary history to prop up a homogeneous and exclusive version of Indian nationalism. This just goes to show once again that music can hardly be studied in isolation from society and politics and McNeil's account helps to make the interconnections.

For the more musically inclined, there is a separate chapter on the sarod gharanas in the twentieth century. The two most prominent sarodists today are Ali Akbar Khan and Amjad Ali Khan both of whom despite a common musical lineage from the Senia Wazir Khan of Rampur practise very distinctive performative styles. Another senior sarodist is the Calcutta based engineer Buddhadev Dasgupta who has a following among connoisseurs but is not as well-known. McNeil is less forthcoming about music repertoires especially the choice of ragas, always a very distinctive feature of the various gharanas. Sometimes his narrative comes across as too singular an account of the sarod. A more comparative approach that incorporates the history of other instruments especially the meteoric rise of the sitar would untangle how sitar and sarod replaced the venerable veena in the modern era. Indeed if popularity is any indication then the present century promises to belong to the santoor and guitar!

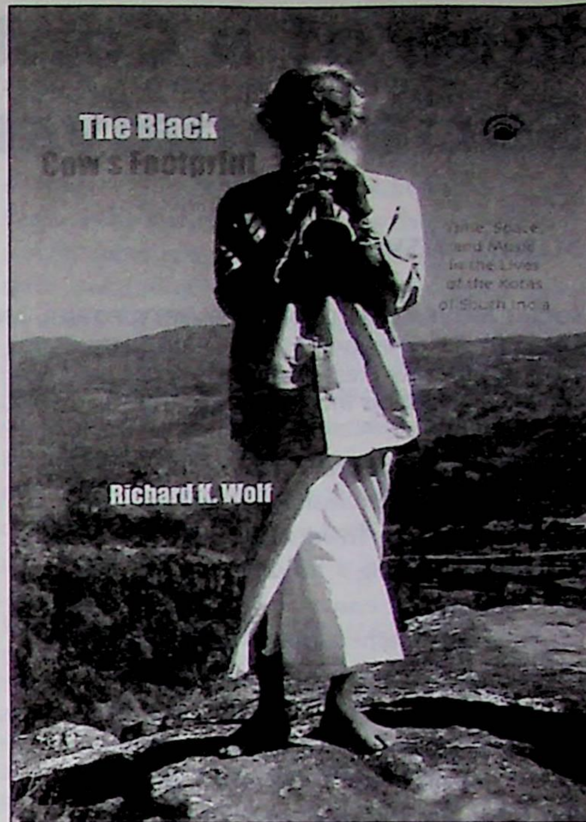
Vishwa Mohan Bhatt's chance encounter with Ry Cooder the famous American guitarist, their album together and the Grammy Award is now a legendary story. Bhatt who is a disciple of Ravi Shankar is widely acknowledged as one of India's leading virtuosos who successfully moulded the guitar to Hindustani classical music following the footsteps of another famous senior guitarist from Rajasthan, Brijbhushan Kabra. This plush biography by Kanchan Mathur reproduces virtually the entire travel album of Bhatt and his family. Readers can make a guess about the nature of this book from some of the captions that accompany the photos: "acknowledging applause", "flanked by beautiful admirers", "Sky is the limit for me" etc. From these photos it is also possible to see the transformation of a young clean-shaven stripling into a bearded worldly star. This tome has been written for publicity and pretends to be little else. It is accompanied by a CD of Bhatt playing Ragas Basant, Desh and Kirwani.■

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Ethnography of a Tradition

Tarun Chhabra

THE BLACK COW'S FOOTPRINT
By Richard K. Wolf
Permanent Black, 2005, New Delhi, distributed by Orient Longman, pp.313, Rs.795.00



The Kotas are a group of indigenous people who have shared their upper Nilgiri homeland in South India, with the Todas since ancient times. They occupy seven villages and number just over 1500 persons. Until a few decades ago, the traditional groups of this area – the Todas, Kotas, Kurumbas and the Badagas had a successful system of economic interdependence. In this set up, the Kotas provided the music and the pottery for the others. They were also the blacksmiths and farmers.

Richard Wolf, an ethnomusicologist from the University of Illinois, spent two years at one Kota hamlet, Kollimel, from 1990, doing his doctoral studies. I remember him as highly motivated and learning to dance with the Kotas from the outset. This book is thus a scholarly tome that a lay reader might find somewhat difficult to absorb.

He introduces the reader to different aspects of Kota life including the general term for their hamlets: *Kokaal*, which has both 'cow leg' and 'Kota place' as etymologies. The latter asserts them as a unique tribal community and the former integrates them within a sacred Indian world. He goes on to mention that the title of this book is derived from the belief that in ancient times, a divine black cow indicated with the hoof, just where each of the seven villages were to be located. Even today, the descendants of the original inhabitants continue to reside at those spots.

He states the ongoing efforts of Kota musicians to ensure the musical and cultural ideal of perfect unison. The following chapters detail the different spatiotemporal forms and the associated music that occur: 1) Anchoring – the origin story mentioned above is an example along with others. 2) Centripetence – moving physically and morally to the centre. The God ceremonies held at all hamlets are exemplified. 3) Centrifugality – moving outwards from the village, during a funeral ceremony. 4) Interlocking – formally joining the complementary components: village, kinship, affinal, or musically, say drum parts.

Some of these indicate changing times for the Kotas. For example, they have now built modern structures for their temples. Therefore, the traditional temple rethatching ritual that occurred during the God ceremony has been replaced by a symbolic ritual of throwing thatch atop the roof of each temple. This upward thatch throwing is highlighted by the shawm (*koll*) players who interrupt the temple-opening tune with a piercing tremolo on the highest note. Thus, he says, the Kotas use many God ceremonial activities to gain experiential access to a virtual, if lost utopia – of their traditional past.

While stating that Kota music in general shares affinity with other music in the Nilgiris, South India and even South Asia, he stresses that it does however, retain a degree of relative independence. This being related to the relationship between a free-floating melody and its accompanying percussion ostinato. He goes on to mention that all Kota instrumental pieces are defined individually by melody as God tunes, dance tunes or funeral tunes. How this knowledge is being transmitted to young Kotas is mentioned. Two bamboo instruments – the *peejl* and the *bugeer* are believed to be played by the spirits of the deceased women or men respectively, as they travel to the afterworld. Both are hence burned with the corpse. He notes that both instruments are now falling into disuse.

The songs that sometimes accompany the music are either God or mourning lyrics. Songs serve as conduits for the transmission of moral stories; they also provide levels of morality to certain places, objects and even sounds. He mentions some birdcalls that are either good or inauspicious. One however wishes that the bird species had been identified. We can guess that the *karvaky* bird is the pied bush-chat, as its role seems to correspond with what the Todas call as *Kaarpilc*. A 'fox' sighting is mentioned as a sign of good luck and since these animals are not found in the area, one assumes that he is referring to a jackal.

It is explained how Kotas know how to react instinctively on hearing certain kinds of music. For example, a person returning to his/her hamlet hears a few strains of a funeral repertoire from a distance, and begins to mourn.

Wolf states that Kotas are taking up employment in distant places and how difficult it is for them to remain as musicians. However, some are coping by tape recording traditional melodies and rehearsing them later. Most Kotas try to return to their hamlets during the annual God ceremony. He notes: the dual goal of attaining new education in the broader Indian context and returning to the fundamentals of Kota culture, guides many Kotas today.

This erudite work is a worthwhile read for all persons interested in the ethnography of a traditional group of South India, as seen through their musical lives.■

Tarun Chhabra, a practising dentist, has been working with the Toda people of the Nilgiris for the past fifteen years – documenting their culture, ethno botany and trying to save these for the future. He also studies the wild flora, ecology and habitat restoration of the upper Nilgiri hills.

Idea of a Continuum in Social Analyses

Susan Visvanathan

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA:POVERTY, POWER, AND POLITICS
Edited by Raka Ray and Mary Fainsod Katzenstein
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006, and Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2005, pp. 311, Rs. 650.00

This is a tightly packed book which provides both objective insights and much information. For scholars living abroad, there will the pleasure of reading a finished and hammered out collection of essays on India. For Indian students and teachers there will be a packaging which uses the recent past as a tool, by which our present is viewed. It is difficult to fault this book because it uses the idea of a continuum in understanding social movements, and yet each author explores the tensions within each continuum, so that the snarls and contradictions are located sharply and well. The introduction by the editors has a light and deft theoretical touch, displaying without revealing all, so that when each writer takes the stage he or she is in some sense centre-stage. All the prize-fighters of the '80s are now in the footnotes, or being analysed by a new stable set of interpreters who are for the most part trained or anchored in the West. The only problem with this is omission of names one would associate with Social Movements in the '80s like T.K.Oommen and M.S.A Rao, but then the nature of studying movements is such, that what was present at one moment becomes past at another, irrefutable logic! but surely it is not antediluvian? Oommen's work on mobilization and institutionalization in newly independent India is certainly a classic. I suppose I raise this problem, because so many of the writers refer to Kerala in some tacit manner, as being the only real general success story. I find this odd, given the crises of the countryside, the real sense of doom most Malyalis feel inspite of the statistics for a flourishing society. Suppose all the Malyalis came home, all at the same time to Kerala? In their absence, their lands lie fallow, small farmers are dependent on the global economy, since all of them seem to be growing rubber or vanilla, and alcoholism and emotional squalor seem to be rampant. But the good stories are recorded in this book and that seems significant, since models serve only one function, which is to highlight one aspect, usually not the use-value of things.

Theoretically the authors capture Paolo Freire's *Pedagogy of Hope*, (1992, 2005) where he argues that academics and activists must come together, and that this new marriage is a sign of the conscientization of communities to globalization. Yet, sadly, there is so much sadness in this hybridity that one realizes that in the end, whether activists are academics, or academics become activist, we still are protected in our enclaves in Berkeley or in New Delhi, and that's what allows us objectivity, that tightly clutched grail of the University. The poor continue to be poor, the numbers increase, even if the percentage does not. … that is, if you add up the increasing incomes of the rich and the lack of income of the poor, you might get a higher per capita income from one year to the next, but the poor are still hungry. But then everyone has a job to do, and the text in this particular narrative proves that the writers are very good at theirs.

Vivek Chibber looks at the interface between parties, unions and the state in an industrializing society. Here too, the Kerala experience provides him with hope, but everyone knows you can't invest in Kerala; workers say "Comrade" to one another and those are the ones who did not go to the Gulf. The new work which looks at RSS and Marxist conflicts is where the axe of interest probably is. But theoretically there is a lot of interest in reading traditional union politics. The fish workers' movement in the '80s for instance showed how well Marxism could combine with Liberation theology, but today the story is substantially different. Patrick Heller too chronicles the same concern with profound social creativity in Kerala, and relegates the conflicts as those between party activists in Northern districts to a footnote. The contributions of Thomas Issac and others like him are well taken, that there is much left to be done, and vigilance and prime of life politics is the only possible option in the circumstances.

Mary John has a detailed essay which looks at the history of women's participation in India, which is more nuanced than the conventional position that feminism is the birthchild of the published university literature that came into India in the 1970s! Maitrayee Choudhary's published work on Women in the National movement might have been an interesting counterpoint to Mary's chronology, as well as those handbooks brought out under the guardianship of scholars like Leela Dube, the older generation of CWDS scholars, Sardamoni, Vimala Ramachandran and others. However omissions are not a real platform for critique, since reasons of convenience and ideological slant are always valid. Her essay, like the book she co-edited on "French Feminism" will remain a valuable contribution, and I do hope that she now has tenure in India's best known National University. If not, all that she has written will be invalid, and the edges of project life actually whittling university scholars will be more than evident. Neema Kudva in her essay on NGOs continues Mary's preoccupation with looking at successful activism and the relationship between the state and the political party. All writers are sensitive to the idea that the party does not make the state, a point worth noting when we look at judicial collusions between parties when they are in power, or in opposition. This is a point well made in the sociological literature on fission and fusion which shows how enemies and friends often combine in the oddest negotiations to avoid blame or to distribute spoils.

Gopal Guru and Anuradha Chakravarty are the only writers in the collection who gave me the sense that they had mastered the disjunctions of time, by looking at movements in terms of shifts and changes. This is theoretically the most difficult part of studying movements, that they never look the same from one year to the next, and some sociological tools which are functionalist, ubiquitous and synchronic really have a hard time. These two writers bring in the nuances of Freire's dialectic method as well as the fearlessness of recording those contradictions, and ambiguous hand-holdings within the Bahujan Samaj. This is the occasion when we need to reanalyse labour, the commoditification of English, the new working class which consists of a degraded form of mental labour, the shift from the hope of becoming a peon to becoming a call centre recruit. This new classlessness, this new form of compromise is where the real dread is. Compromise to the dictates of liberalism means that the buffer economy of the middleclass is a pretentiousness which does not allow for true freedom .The new mechanisms of information technology have led to laboratory conditions without autonomy. These new discreet forms of capital allow profit and philanthrophy to subsist side by side in a mechanism which renders the educated and the miseducated to be equalized as labourers in the machine.The Honda Workers Strike and the inability of the overworked to strike in the capsules of information production centres are the sad lynch-pins of these essays of retrospection. The Prime Minister's motivation toward labour reform must take the findings of the National Labour Institute on working conditions in call centres very seriously.

Gail Omvedt's essay brings back to our memory Sharad Joshi and the contradictions of time and social movement, something which Amita Baviskar also records. Omvedt tells you where Joshi is now, and it is interesting because

so many of the questions of why people change tracks and do what they do is a puzzle. Her essay is brilliant and non-judgemental, merely recording the way in which these shifts have a logic and are about self-preservation, rather than about an idea. Bharat and India are no longer contrary, when it comes to profit, internationalism is fine. Ronald Herring shows us why other farmers, like Joshi, want biotech seeds. These farmers want them because they are profitable. The study of farmers' suicides should apparently be left to some other seminar, to those trained in pedagogic socialism like Sainath, or to consultants to the Planning Commission like Jayati Ghosh. In some senses, the objectivity of the Sociological method is to end up by saying "Everyone is Right!" (just state your perspective.) Herring has the latest data, and he says that biotech is here to stay. In France there seem to be more debates, and the industrialized farmers are afraid of Vandana Shiva! I met one near Chartres, in June 2004. Professor Denis Matringe of MSH Paris who was present, kindly translated for me. The farmer was at the Benedictine nunnery for a festive occasion, but told me that French farmers were very interested in Biotech agriculture, and were not able to proceed because of the resistance of their people. He had just met Vandana Shiva at a laboratory in America and he said she had shouted a lot! While picking chemical free cherries off a tree in the orchard with us, in the company of his family and friends, he told me very nervously that he found Indians very aggressive! Herring seems to believe that suicides are due to other social resources (such as debt, perhaps…). But then as the argument goes, the machine wears all of us down, and we accept modernity because it is monolithic. Tanika Sarkar in her inimitable scholarly and lucid style shows us why the individual stress against heinous crimes experienced by the middle class does not match their comfortable acceptance of state policies in right wing or liberal contexts. It explains why in the end the murderous crimes of the Congress of 1984 and of the regime of the BJP right through the 90s, were sought to be cancelled out, rather than being judicially fixed. Amita Baviskar expresses the same startled sense of academic surprise that movements lose their sense of immediacy when vested class interests blur the real need of the poor to survive in their own land. Who will be their spokespersons? Perhaps the Fisher's Struggle has thrown up its activist intelligentsia which was able to orchestrate Tsunami relief in a way that co-opted the state and NGO's without losing it's own sense of roots and identity. Even there journalists and social workers and lawyers have shown that class and caste interests bifurcated humanitarian aid and its receipt. To speak out and confirm that there is a visible decimation of labouring class identities has perhaps been left to journalists and charismatic figures in Indian society.■

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Introduction to a Discipline

Bikram Jeet Batra

SOCIOLOGY OF LAW
Edited by Indra Deva
Oxford University Press, 2005, Oxford in India Readings in Sociology and Social Anthropology,
pp. 376, Rs. 650.00

Published in 2005, the book under review is an eclectic collection of papers with contributions by prominent law teachers and sociologists covering broad areas including 'Functioning of the Legal System', 'Legal Profession', 'Law and Religious Identity', 'Law and the Disadvantaged Groups', 'Societal Role of Judiciary' and 'Law and Social Change'. The editor of the collection (a sociologist at the Pt. Ravishankar Shukla University, Raipur) correctly observes in his introduction that the sociology of law has not yet developed in India as a full-fledged formal discipline. In such circumstances, this volume can be of use to students and scholars alike as an introduction to this discipline.

Unfortunately only one of the 21 papers included in this collection is contemporary. Of the remaining, the bulk are over two decades old. A few are classic texts – Derett's 'Administration of Hindu Law by the British', Marc Galanter's 'Pursuing Equality in a Land of Hierarchy' and Upendra Baxi's 'Colonial Nature of the Indian Legal System' are notable amongst them. Some choices, however, are puzzling, especially since a few contributions appear dated. Further, is it a coincidence that there is hardly any contribution by women scholars to this volume? One also wonders whether the absence of more recent work was deliberate or one necessitated by the absence of scholarship in this area.

This absence of scholarship, research and empirical study has been oft-noted by the editor, and one cannot but agree. The experience with 'marital cruelty' in Section 498-A of the Indian Penal Code is illustrative. This provision has often been targeted by senior officials alleging misuse and such views have now seeped into the judiciary. There has, however, been little research or empirical evidence to support such a position. While some regional research exposing this myth of overwhelming misuse is available, a lot more needs to be done. This is not an isolated example – studies on impact of law and legislation are rarely available. The absence of research on the use of the death penalty in India has also led to unsupported and misleading conclusions of its deterrence value.

The editor's introduction, while useful in parts, tends to be simplistic and therefore inadequate. The discussion on traditional Indian law is limited only to the ancient Hindu system and there is no acknowledgement that various other codes and systems operated not only amongst tribal communities but within the myriad states that made up 'traditional' India. More disturbing is the complete absence of any reference to Islamic law, as the editor moves swiftly from 'traditional' (read ancient Hindu) law to British colonial law. (In fact references to Islamic law in the entire volume are largely limited to Kavita Khory's analysis of the implications of the Shah Bano judgement). Even in his own contribution to this volume – 'Growth of Traditional Legal System', excerpted from *Judicial values and Institutions in Indian Tradition*, the author only discusses the ancient Hindu legal tradition, revealing his view on what constitutes 'Indian' and 'traditional'.

The editor's position on law and its close relationship with power, politics and the nature of the state once again exposes his political leanings. He notes "Law *has been used* as an instrument of subjugation and exploitation of vast lands by the colonial powers. Even within a country the legal system *can* serve as a tool for the oppression of certain sections on society by the privileged strata. It is an *open question* whether the present legal system in India is being put to this use against such sections as the tribals" (p. 28 emphasis added). Open question? Only if you ignore years of involuntary displacement caused by acquisition of tribal lands for the 'greater common good'! On the whole, the introduction disappoints and is too often reduced to clichés and sermons.

Fortunately Baxi's exploration of the colonial nature of the Indian legal system

follows. Originally written in 1982, the piece makes for sad reading as the major problems identified then – the 'top down' model, lack of access to legal information and legal services; still remain areas of concern and crisis. This paper and Justice Krishna Iyer's piece on 'Law and the People' adequately remind us of the ills that continue to plague the legal system and that in itself makes this collection valuable. Both these contributions also make a plea for increased decentralization of the legal system through Nyaya Panchayats. Justice Iyer's plea to "not only tighten up the nuts and bolts but redesign" is also understandable, but care needs to be taken to ensure that these calls do not become an excuse for the 'fast tracked pro-conviction reform' being pushed through nowadays.

In his introduction to the segment on the legal profession, the editor notes that a large chunk on the research in sociology of law in India has taken place around the legal profession. That, however, is not reflected in the papers in the collection and this segment is the least absorbing and exciting. A saving grace is Charles Morrisson's colourful and lively narrative of lawyers in a small district court town in Haryana which contrasts the other rather dull and even pedestrian contributions. One area that needed more attention in this segment was the relationship of the legal profession and the legal aid system. In this context, J.S Gandhi's harsh words directed at the legal profession in 'Law as an Instrument of Change in India' are particularly welcome. Outside the segment, Derett's brief foray into the birth of the Indian legal profession too deserves an honourable mention.

Another major shortcoming of the volume is the lack of discussion on gender given the many areas where it was possible and even required. The sole contribution is placed (unsurprisingly) within the segment on disadvantaged groups and authored by Professor S.P. Sathe – more renowned for his work on Administrative and Constitutional Law. This segment also carries Marc Galanter's contribution – an excerpt from the excellent *Law and Society in Modern India.* Galanter's analysis and assessment of the compensatory discrimination policy in India is succinct and crisp. One can only hope that the narrative of past injustice will continue to keep alive the move towards enlarging the arena of affirmative action. The absence, however of any acknowledgement of the dalit identity is surprising and the term does not feature in the volume. More surprising when the reader comes across the editor's reference to "atrocities against harijans" in the introduction to this segment (p. 228).

The volume also provides passion in the form of an angry contribution by Ram Jethmalani attacking the opposition to the Mandal Commission recommendations, as also in Justice Krishna Iyer's poetic plea for PIL to be the 'wind of change' towards 'the promised land'. Krishna Iyer also calls for more radical procedural reform for PILs to make access to justice – a nostalgic reminder of past-times when PIL was seen as path-breaking reform. In the present context, not only are the Courts cracking down on procedure but even the very relaxing of locus standi that took place is now being questioned – readers may remember the attitude of the Courts in the Narmada Bachao Andolan cases as also in the recent challenge to Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code. One cannot help but be disappointed with the one-dimensional discussion on PIL in this collection. Morje's contribution – a fifteen-year old compilation of prominent PIL cases is missable and could have been easily replaced by a recent critique of two decades of PIL and its (un)successes.

Probably the strongest segment of the volume is 'law and religious identity'. Both Derett and Smith provide a fascinating analysis of British administration of Hindu and Islamic law with the help of Qazis and Pandits and using English rules and notions of justice to fill the gaps. Drawing a comparison, Mansfield argues provocatively, that the situation is not very different in post-independence India where equally alien secular courts attempt to interpret religious personal law. While Derett's paper ends with the Hindu Code Bill, Smith's contribution provides a useful insight into the debate inside and outside Parliament on the reform of Hindu personal law. Both Smith and Mansfield also raise the question of 'selective' reform of personal laws and Dieter Conrad also discusses the position of the Hindu right on the subject and provides a detailed analysis of the constitutionality of different religious personal laws. The Uniform Civil Code (UCC) is also discussed by Smith who views it as an inevitable long-term solution. Mansfield, on the other hand, argues that to place the issue as a choice between personal law and uniform civil code is to pose the issue too sharply and therefore suggests a more politically feasible optional (opt-in/opt-out) code. (This difference in views is also understandable given that Smith wrote his paper in 1967 while Mansfield had the benefit of another quarter of a century to examine the UCC conundrum in India). Needless to add, this volume provides no final answers to the UCC muddle, yet it raises a number of valid questions and differing positions along with a historical perspective.

While the contributions to this volume are of uneven quality, the presence of a few classic texts and the number of questions that the volume manages to raise makes this collection useful for students and scholars interested in the Sociology of Law in India.■

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Jurisprudence Strategies Questioned

Kalpana Kannabiran

MEN'S LAWS, WOMEN'S LIVES: A CONSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON RELIGION, COMMON LAW AND CULTURE IN SOUTH ASIA
Edited by Indira Jaising
Women Unlimited, Delhi, 2005, pp.392, Rs. 500.00

Constitutionalism and gender justice in South Asia is underwritten by the colonial legacy of each of the countries in this region, that put in place plural legal systems ensuring the troubled coexistence of religious with secular/public laws, each with its own institutional apparatuses. While there are differences in the ways in which this plurality plays out, a uniform consequence has been the systematic dispossession of women through the convergence of state with community in matters related to women's entitlements – almost inevitably relegated to the private realm. The central question that Indira Jaising attempts to address is, what is the relationship between the right to the freedom of religion and the rights to equality before the law and against discrimination, especially where religion is interpreted in a way that sanctions and validates discrimination? However even before this question is posed there are more fundamental ones that must be resolved: the question of defining religion, sifting through practices to settle up which are religious practices, and then deciding which religious practices are entitled to constitutional protection under the freedom of religion provision, have led the courts to devise jurisprudential strategies that remain problematic. Pratap Bhanu Mehta traces this process through case law, proposing in the final analysis, a theory of toleration that would be built around notions of democratization and self-determination as the only viable option for a plural democracy.

Identity is central to social existence and has become increasingly central to discourses on identity and belonging. Women find themselves in difficult positions where their sense of identity is filtered through the experience of their communities that are governed by men, exemplified in the response of the Sri Lankan woman to a question on whether she thought she faced discrimination because she was a woman or because she was a Muslim: "but I am both", cited by Ramani Muttettuwegama (p. 173). In situations where these communities are marginalized or where they are subjected to discrimination/exclusion, women acquiesce in discriminatory practices, "in the interests of the group/community" thereby reinforcing the subordinate status within the hierarchy of their religious, ethnic or tribal identity (p.25). Mapping this process of bending women's interests to community will in diverse locations, Radhika Coomaraswamy argues that questions of cultural relativism must be addressed in ways that do not derogate women's rights to economic independence and their right against torture pointing to the specific ways in which this has/might be achieved. 'The Women Living Under Muslim Laws' project by Cassandra Balchin suggests, explores this connection between democratic plurality, identity and women's autonomy in different countries, taking a careful view of law reform and its potential both to impact positively on women's status in communities and to respect cultural specificity and plurality.

A cursory look at feminist struggles in India immediately foregrounds the troubled co-existence, conflict even, of the free exercise of religion and sex equality. Martha Nussbaum traces the complexity of the questions that arise in this dilemma. While there is on the surface a polarization of viewpoints – the "secular humanist feminist" and the "traditionalist feminist" – she proposes that two principles might guide us out of the dilemma. The first is the principle of equal respect, which means not merely formal symmetry but "rooting out legal sources of hierarchy, and establishing a legal regime in which no groups has supremacy over another" (p. 121); the second is the principle of constraint by fundamental entitlements, namely that "fundamental entitlements shall not be abridged for any citizen, for the sake of giving religion special prerogatives" (p. 122). Faustina Pereira grounds this argument in the fatwa debates in Bangladesh, where she asserts that the "fear of loss of power has always been at the root of every resistance by the religious right against any policy or action in favour of women" (pp. 199-200), therefore, human rights advocates need to "initiate the evolution from straightforward religious doctrinaire arguments towards arguments of gender within constitutionalism and state interest" (p. 200). Salma Sobhan, on a more general level, maps the path of gender justice from colonialism to constitutionalism to islamization in Bangladesh, arguing that it is important even while speaking about equality to take serious note of the social conditions and constraints within which the debates are located, so that they may be addressed simultaneously using different public education strategies, instead of an over-dependence on the law.

But how does one resolve the dilemma that Nussbaum speaks of, even theoretically, in a context where there is a state religion coupled with the existence of plural legal systems? Jeff Redding reviews the judicial system in Pakistan looking specifically at the ways in which the different legal systems interrupt each other to the extent of quashing equality inspired legislative efforts (p. 156). Sharan Parmar examines these questions drawing on international and comparative constitutional law, and observes in her conclusion that the issues involved in the freedom of religion debates are wider than religion – they are issues that require social transformation and development (p.250). Moving equality/discrimination discourse outside the "sameness-difference" bind, Catharine Mackinnon puts forth an alternative conception that has animated anti-racism and anti sexism work in the United States and South Africa, especially, but also other parts of the world and applies this to the personal laws debates in India. Inequality in this view is "not predicated on sameness or vitiated by difference, but is a practice of social subordination, of second class status, of ranking as inferior, of historical hierarchy. In its view, the opposite of equality is not difference but hierarchy. Equality thus requires promoting equality of status for historically subordinated groups, dismantling group hierarchy" (p. 264). Rather than be paralysed by the fear of being branded culturally insensitive, she argues, the Indian state would do better to recognize that there is nothing "personal" about law and treatment based on sex (pp. 274-276) and cautions us that it "is no coincidence that what is denominated as personal is often precisely where sex inequality of women to men is crucially enacted" (p. 274). Archana Parashar attempts to establish through a historical review of personal laws that "religious personal laws have transformed over time and that religious freedom can be enjoyed simultaneously with granting women equality in personal matters" (p. 292). While this is a valid argument, her further analysis of the ways in which minority communities must ensure equality of status for women, does not adequately theorize the complex positioning of women of minority communities, and minorities in a majoritarian society. It is not simply a matter of difference but of domination and subordination – cultural, political, material – within which these questions are embedded. Just family law therefore can only be just within a larger context of justice, equality and democracy. Historically, Muslim leadership, as Zoya Hasan points out, has not spurned state intervention altogether, citing the example of Ashraf Ali Thanawi (p. 366). While the Muslim community is diverse, heterogenous and hierarchical, as other communities are too, what counts as leadership is an artifact of power wholly dependent of government recognition – the Muslim Personal Law Board, a male clerical body. What is significant is the convergence of the state with a non-representative body of the minority community on the one hand, and the increasingly radical voices of women against fundamentalism and for reform from within the community on the other (pp. 367-368).

This volume consisting of sixteen essays drawing on the experiences of India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal, place before us an important conversation that must be continued in greater depth and with greater intensity especially in the present times.■

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Reading the Law Within Public Discourses

Pratiksha Baxi

LAW AND THE NEW EROTIC JUSTICE: POLITICS OF POSTCOLONIALISM
By Ratna Kapur
Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 217, Rs. 650.00

Ratna Kapur's objective to outline a postcolonial feminist framework takes seriously, the emergence and legal regulation of what she terms the new *sexual subaltern* and of the new images of sex in contemporary Indian society. Telling the stories of law then is to interrogate the implication of law in the contemporary reformulations of culture and sexuality. Traversing many domains of law, different state agencies and the claims made by groups speaking on behalf of women or sexual subalterns, Kapur weaves a powerful argument to critique those manoeuvres that use cultural essentialism to inscribe sexual normativity while presenting culture as static and immutable. Her research, however, is not limited to the local, national and transnational contexts of legal regulation in the Indian subcontinent; rather her work also engages with what may be termed "diasporic" legalities. For instance, the circuits of power that inscribe the 'transnational migrant subject' — the subject 'who crosses borders and occupies a subaltern position' inform the discussion on the blurring of trafficking and migration, global flow of migrants in countries such as Britain, and Australian responses to refugee or asylum-seekers (p.139). The book journeys through many contemporary debates in India in order to lay a claim to a postcolonial legal feminism. This claim is not made in *opposition* to western feminism, rather the project challenges 'the systems of knowledge that continue to inform feminist understandings of women and the subaltern subject in the world' (p.4). A postcolonial feminism challenges the universalizing strategies of those 'feminist projects, especially liberalism, that fetishise the Third World woman', and details how the colonial past inflects our present to challenge the pathologisation of sex and the constitution of the Third World women as abject subjects (p.4).

The author argues that to forward a more 'progressive movement for women's rights', then, it is necessary to recognize 'three major theoretical and practical shifts' (p.128). First, women's subjectivities are historically, culturally and socially determined. Second, feminist legal politics must foreground the *peripheral* subject to bring about significant shifts in normative frameworks. Third, when working with peripheral subjects there is a 'need to understand resistance as more than simply a claim for rights' (p.128). This entails challenges to normative heterosexist frameworks of gender, sexuality and culture.

Kapur sets out to map the spaces of those forms of sexuality that have been historically marginalized, deconstruct the opposition between sex and culture and explore the political project of desire. She makes clear that her aim is not to deny the violence and exploitation that surrounds women's lives, but to make visible the desires of the erotic subject so that she is not always portrayed as a victim. For instance, chapter three entitled, 'Erotic Disruptions and Legal narratives of Culture, Sex and Nation in India' opens with an engagement with the film *Fire* to provide an instance of cultural hybridity located on the 'precipice of desire and subversion' (p.51). The film, Kapoor argues, unravels the moves to reify culture and thereby, decentres the framing of specific sexual practices as illegitimate, foreign and pathological. She aims to provide a resounding critique of the discourses of *rescue* and *rehabilitation* that constitute Third World women as victims, especially in the contexts of the rise of the Hindu Right. This chapter which examines the growing *hysteria* around culture centred markedly around sex/sexuality finds critique through an examination of the legal battle over the screening of *Bandit Queen*, holding of the Miss Beauty pageant in India (1996), satellite broadcasting and increased backlash against the new found visibility of sexual subalterns.

Kapur argues that the analyses of the relationship drawn between culture and sexuality today must be grounded in the way the nation has been narrativized through the negotiation that marked 19^{th} century encounters with colonial regimes of law and power. The nationalists and revivalists constructed the "home" as the "pure" space, which harvested an authentic Indian culture uncontaminated by the colonial encounter. Kapur takes recourse to the writings of Partha Chatterjee, Tanika Sarkar and Lata Mani, to understand how the colonial encounter reconstituted the relation between culture and sexuality. She cites the argument that official Indian nationalist discourse constituted the modern nation in the "autonomous" domain of culture since the public domain was unavailable to the nationalists to script public institutions as a repository of national culture. However, the "home" unlike the portrait proffered by official discourses of nationalism and revivalism, was a highly contested space, which challenged the attempts to circumscribe women to positions of preserving cultural identity. These contestations were marginalized in the official discourses between the nationalists and colonial rulers.

Kapur then argues that the relationship between nation, culture and sexuality continues to provide the discursive context, which frames the resistance to the new images of sex and the voices of sexual subalterns who pose a challenge to normative sexuality. Kapur, outlines how normative sexuality when historicized in the Indian context string together constructs of motherhood, wifehood, domesticity, marriage, chastity, purity and self-sacrifice. These cultural constructs were deployed to distinguish between colonial power and the colonial subject. This history redefines the meaning of normative sexuality in postcolonial India as distinct from its usage in western liberal traditions.

Today, the challenge to normative sexuality by sexual subalterns is seen as threatening the purity of the Indian nation. The difference between then and now is that the contemporary controversies pose explicit challenges to the idea that sex is a contaminating, negative, corrupting force. She argues that this 'sexual challenge is simultaneously a cultural challenge' (p.56). Not only do new images of sex and new radical sexual subalterns challenge cultural scripts, rather this script is constantly being rewritten. This rewriting is not premised on the abandonment of cultural values, rather these are written into the script in the contexts of globalization and fundamentalisms. What happens when an "erotic subject" comes to law? Concretely, what happens is that the erotic subject 'counters the weight of sexual and cultural normativity' but her challenges to these normativities, 'creates space for legal arguments that culture is not fixed or static' and thereby forces 'courts and law to engage with the fluidity of culture and its contested histories'(p.92). Cultural hybridity, is described as the 'postcolonial moment' whereby a 'return to uncontaminated values is impossible' (p.88). Kapur thereby rejects the idea that the stigma of sex and the marginalization or silencing of sexual subalterns scripted by the dominant narrative of culture, sex and nation cannot be destabilized.

In contrast, Kapur's reading of the Supreme Court (SC) judgment on sexual harassment as the confluence of colonial notions of modesty into the category of unwanted sexual behaviour suggests that the legal responses 'are emerging as tools of repressing sexual speech and expression' (p.41). However, equally we may argue that the

implementation of the guidelines in different sites does not produce identical effects of power and knowledge in every workplace. The mediation of the implementation of the guidelines with specific movements or campaigns has also rewritten the Supreme Court definitions and these have been enacted in university spaces. The issue of dress codes against women students, now performed in the name of implementing the SC guidelines to redress sexual harassment (even though the SC says nothing about dress codes), has a different genealogy. This genealogy is linked to the way sexuality is regulated in university spaces in the name of safety to produce docile subjects.

Kapur's engagement with public discourses proceeds to look at the international women's rights movements. The campaigns addressing violence against women (VAW) in the global networks of women's rights represent the 'postcolonial or Third World subject – in particular, the female subject' as the 'real or authentic victim'. This representational politics has also come to be replicated in some postcolonial contexts and re-inscribes gender and cultural essentialism. Culture is invoked primarily to explain the different ways in which women experience violence, in the process often reinforcing essentialist understandings of cultures and representing particular cultures as brutal and barbaric' (p.104). This results in a displacement onto spaces defined as First World and those circumscribed as Third World, creating a "native subject" and thereby prepares the ground for intervention best described as imperialist.

We are told that while there have been substantial gains that have followed the VAW campaigns, which have highlighted the victim-subject, however this representation when reinforced is not necessarily empowering. The failure to bring about a political transformation lies in part to the claim to authenticity. Kapur argues that Indian 'feminism has set itself up as anti-western to meet the charge of anti-nationalism. This authenticity move, which is a symptom of postcolonialism, has been played out partly through the victim subject. Ironically, this move feeds into the representation of Third World women and the victim subject that dominates feminist legal politics in the international arena' (p.120).

This point is illustrated by two public controversies. First, the opposition to beauty pageants as signifying the impact of westernization and globalization, by women's groups in 1996, and second, the positions on sex work as excluding the possibility of consent. The protest against the beauty pageant is read as convergent with the view of the Hindu Right (p.123). Likewise, the opposition to the 'carnival held in Calcutta to celebrate the lives and struggles of sex workers in Asia and to demand their basic human rights to mobility, family and work be respected' in 2001 by a 'large number of feminists and women's groups' has been cited as an example of how Indian feminists mark their difference from western feminism. The argument here is that these Indian feminists perceive sex work predominantly as a form of exploitation, outcome of poverty or deception. Challenging this position, the author maintains that 'the postcolonial sexual subaltern subject can consent to sex-work, and that she may consent to move or enter into a consensual arrangement with someone who arranges her transport from one port to another, free from coercion or violence, is also challenging at a normative level' (p.130). The sex-worker, cited as an example of a peripheral subject, is located in spaces outside the disciplinary power of the family is a "speaking"/ "animated" subject who brings about "several disruptions" (p.129).

We encounter a sense of slight disquiet with the description of every group speaking on behalf of women as "feminist", and the lack of systematic disaggregation of the voices and positions within women's groups especially when some of these voices have resisted the trappings of claiming an authentic non-western feminism. We perhaps need to name the homophobic responses by some women's groups dominated by left politics against the political campaigns of lesbians groups and the ongoing "debates" that have ensued. Or refer to the debates raised by dalit feminism to suggest the contestations within what comes to be labelled as "feminism" in India. In other words, perhaps the complex histories of the contemporary women's movements demand a greater attention to those voices that are not incorporated into the iconography of Indian feminism to examine the multiple claims to truth critically.

This book is invested in a specific methodological project. It draws attention to reading the law in relation to the way public discourse, public sphere and/or publics is constituted. It points to how the method of reading appellate judgments is quite central to the way in which the stories of sexual subalterns are told, and the representational practices of the courts require far greater reflection in our work. It provokes us to question how some victim narratives acquire an iconic status in feminist recounting, and the reading of specific cases to tell law's stories often means that the subject's story ends abruptly with the judicial silences on the victim-subject. We wish, however, that the selections of the cases that were heard in courts of appeals and public controversies around issues had been held to scrutiny across different sites. The inflections of feminist discourse by the limits of the discourse of appellate law then perhaps need radical reflection. Rather ruefully one may add that Indian feminist jurisprudence is exhausted by readings in the interstices of feminist legal theory, the women's movements, state law and feminist lawyering today. We ask whether the everyday practices in courts offer us a way of detailing how law is embedded in social and political processes; and the use of courts for ends other than those envisaged in law may offer us a picture of state law as a space that is "privatised" for these ends. Likewise, we may ask if there would be a different picture of feminist legal theories if one were to look at the *presence* of the sexual subaltern through the *suspension* of the law. Indeed, this book may be read on different registers to find provocation to think through specific campaigns, the nature of feminisms in India and indeed, the very method of doing feminist legal research.■

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By Ratna Kapur
Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 217, Rs. 650.00

Ratna Kapur's objective to outline a postcolonial feminist framework takes seriously, the emergence and legal regulation of what she terms the new *sexual subaltern* and of the new images of sex in contemporary Indian society. Telling the stories of law then is to interrogate the implication of law in the contemporary reformulations of culture and sexuality. Traversing many domains of law, different state agencies and the claims made by groups speaking on behalf of women or sexual subalterns, Kapur weaves a powerful argument to critique those manoeuvres that use cultural essentialism to inscribe sexual normativity while presenting culture as static and immutable. Her research, however, is not limited to the local, national and transnational contexts of legal regulation in the Indian subcontinent; rather her work also engages with what may be termed "diasporic" legalities. For instance, the circuits of power that inscribe the 'transnational migrant subject' — the subject 'who crosses borders and occupies a subaltern position' inform the discussion on the blurring of trafficking and migration, global flow of migrants in countries such as Britain, and Australian responses to refugee or asylum-seekers (p.139). The book journeys through many contemporary debates in India in order to lay a claim to a postcolonial legal feminism. This claim is not made in *opposition* to western feminism, rather the project challenges 'the systems of knowledge that continue to inform feminist understandings of women and the subaltern subject in the world' (p.4). A postcolonial feminism challenges the universalizing strategies of those 'feminist projects, especially liberalism, that fetishise the Third World woman', and details how the colonial past inflects our present to challenge the pathologisation of sex and the constitution of the Third World women as abject subjects (p.4).

The author argues that to forward a more 'progressive movement for women's rights', then, it is necessary to recognize 'three major theoretical and practical shifts' (p.128). First, women's subjectivities are historically, culturally and socially determined. Second, feminist legal politics must foreground the *peripheral* subject to bring about significant shifts in normative frameworks. Third, when working with peripheral subjects there is a 'need to understand resistance as more than simply a claim for rights' (p.128). This entails challenges to normative heterosexist frameworks of gender, sexuality and culture.

Kapur sets out to map the spaces of those forms of sexuality that have been historically marginalized, deconstruct the opposition between sex and culture and explore the political project of desire. She makes clear that her aim is not to deny the violence and exploitation that surrounds women's lives, but to make visible the desires of the erotic subject so that she is not always portrayed as a victim. For instance, chapter three entitled, 'Erotic Disruptions and Legal narratives of Culture, Sex and Nation in India' opens with an engagement with the film *Fire* to provide an instance of cultural hybridity located on the 'precipice of desire and subversion' (p.51). The film, Kapoor argues, unravels the moves to reify culture and thereby, decentres the framing of specific sexual practices as illegitimate, foreign and pathological. She aims to provide a resounding critique of the discourses of *rescue* and *rehabilitation* that constitute Third World women as victims, especially in the contexts of the rise of the Hindu Right. This chapter which examines the growing *hysteria* around culture centred markedly around sex/sexuality finds critique through an examination of the legal battle over the screening of *Bandit Queen*, holding of the Miss Beauty pageant in India (1996), satellite broadcasting and increased backlash against the new found visibility of sexual subalterns.

Kapur argues that the analyses of the relationship drawn between culture and sexuality today must be grounded in the way the nation has been narrativized through the negotiation that marked 19th century encounters with colonial regimes of law and power. The nationalists and revivalists constructed the "home" as the "pure" space, which harvested an authentic Indian culture uncontaminated by the colonial encounter. Kapur takes recourse to the writings of Partha Chatterjee, Tanika Sarkar and Lata Mani, to understand how the colonial encounter reconstituted the relation between culture and sexuality. She cites the argument that official Indian nationalist discourse constituted the modern nation in the "autonomous" domain of culture since the public domain was unavailable to the nationalists to script public institutions as a repository of national culture. However, the "home" unlike the portrait proffered by official discourses of nationalism and revivalism, was a highly contested space, which challenged the attempts to circumscribe women to positions of preserving cultural identity. These contestations were marginalized in the official discourses between the nationalists and colonial rulers.

Kapur then argues that the relationship between nation, culture and sexuality continues to provide the discursive context, which frames the resistance to the new images of sex and the voices of sexual subalterns who pose a challenge to normative sexuality. Kapur, outlines how normative sexuality when historicized in the Indian context string together constructs of motherhood, wifehood, domesticity, marriage, chastity, purity and self-sacrifice. These cultural constructs were deployed to distinguish between colonial power and the colonial subject. This history redefines the meaning of normative sexuality in postcolonial India as distinct from its usage in western liberal traditions.

Today, the challenge to normative sexuality by sexual subalterns is seen as threatening the purity of the Indian nation. The difference between then and now is that the contemporary controversies pose explicit challenges to the idea that sex is a contaminating, negative, corrupting force. She argues that this 'sexual challenge is simultaneously a cultural challenge' (p.56). Not only do new images of sex and new radical sexual subalterns challenge cultural scripts, rather this script is constantly being rewritten. This rewriting is not premised on the abandonment of cultural values, rather these are written into the script in the contexts of globalization and fundamentalisms. What happens when an "erotic subject" comes to law? Concretely, what happens is that the erotic subject 'counters the weight of sexual and cultural normativity' but her challenges to these normativities, 'creates space for legal arguments that culture is not fixed or static' and thereby forces 'courts and law to engage with the fluidity of culture and its contested histories'(p.92). Cultural hybridity, is described as the 'postcolonial moment' whereby a 'return to uncontaminated values is impossible' (p.88). Kapur thereby rejects the idea that the stigma of sex and the marginalization or silencing of sexual subalterns scripted by the dominant narrative of culture, sex and nation cannot be destabilized.

In contrast, Kapur's reading of the Supreme Court (SC) judgment on sexual harassment as the confluence of colonial notions of modesty into the category of unwanted sexual behaviour suggests that the legal responses 'are emerging as tools of repressing sexual speech and expression' (p.41). However, equally we may argue that the

implementation of the guidelines in different sites does not produce identical effects of power and knowledge in every workplace. The mediation of the implementation of the guidelines with specific movements or campaigns has also rewritten the Supreme Court definitions and these have been enacted in university spaces. The issue of dress codes against women students, now performed in the name of implementing the SC guidelines to redress sexual harassment (even though the SC says nothing about dress codes), has a different genealogy. This genealogy is linked to the way sexuality is regulated in university spaces in the name of safety to produce docile subjects.

Kapur's engagement with public discourses proceeds to look at the international women's rights movements. The campaigns addressing violence against women (VAW) in the global networks of women's rights represent the 'postcolonial or Third World subject – in particular, the female subject' as the 'real or authentic victim'. This representational politics has also come to be replicated in some postcolonial contexts and re-inscribes gender and cultural essentialism. Culture is invoked primarily to explain the different ways in which women experience violence, in the process often reinforcing essentialist understandings of cultures and representing particular cultures as brutal and barbaric' (p.104). This results in a displacement onto spaces defined as First World and those circumscribed as Third World, creating a "native subject" and thereby prepares the ground for intervention best described as imperialist.

We are told that while there have been substantial gains that have followed the VAW campaigns, which have highlighted the victim-subject, however this representation when reinforced is not necessarily empowering. The failure to bring about a political transformation lies in part to the claim to authenticity. Kapur argues that Indian 'feminism has set itself up as anti-western to meet the charge of anti-nationalism. This authenticity move, which is a symptom of postcolonialism, has been played out partly through the victim subject. Ironically, this move feeds into the representation of Third World women and the victim subject that dominates feminist legal politics in the international arena' (p.120).

This point is illustrated by two public controversies. First, the opposition to beauty pageants as signifying the impact of westernization and globalization, by women's groups in 1996, and second, the positions on sex work as excluding the possibility of consent. The protest against the beauty pageant is read as convergent with the view of the Hindu Right (p.123). Likewise, the opposition to the 'carnival held in Calcutta to celebrate the lives and struggles of sex workers in Asia and to demand their basic human rights to mobility, family and work be respected' in 2001 by a 'large number of feminists and women's groups' has been cited as an example of how Indian feminists mark their difference from western feminism. The argument here is that these Indian feminists perceive sex work predominantly as a form of exploitation, outcome of poverty or deception. Challenging this position, the author maintains that 'the postcolonial sexual subaltern subject can consent to sex-work, and that she may consent to move or enter into a consensual arrangement with someone who arranges her transport from one port to another, free from coercion or violence, is also challenging at a normative level' (p.130). The sex-worker, cited as an example of a peripheral subject, is located in spaces outside the disciplinary power of the family is a "speaking"/ "animated" subject who brings about "several disruptions" (p.129).

We encounter a sense of slight disquiet with the description of every group speaking on behalf of women as "feminist", and the lack of systematic disaggregation of the voices and positions within women's groups especially when some of these voices have resisted the trappings of claiming an authentic non-western feminism. We perhaps need to name the homophobic responses by some women's groups dominated by left politics against the political campaigns of lesbians groups and the ongoing "debates" that have ensued. Or refer to the debates raised by dalit feminism to suggest the contestations within what comes to be labelled as "feminism" in India. In other words, perhaps the complex histories of the contemporary women's movements demand a greater attention to those voices that are not incorporated into the iconography of Indian feminism to examine the multiple claims to truth critically.

This book is invested in a specific methodological project. It draws attention to reading the law in relation to the way public discourse, public sphere and/or publics is constituted. It points to how the method of reading appellate judgments is quite central to the way in which the stories of sexual subalterns are told, and the representational practices of the courts require far greater reflection in our work. It provokes us to question how some victim narratives acquire an iconic status in feminist recounting, and the reading of specific cases to tell law's stories often means that the subject's story ends abruptly with the judicial silences on the victim-subject. We wish, however, that the selections of the cases that were heard in courts of appeals and public controversies around issues had been held to scrutiny across different sites. The inflections of feminist discourse by the limits of the discourse of appellate law then perhaps need radical reflection. Rather ruefully one may add that Indian feminist jurisprudence is exhausted by readings in the interstices of feminist legal theory, the women's movements, state law and feminist lawyering today. We ask whether the everyday practices in courts offer us a way of detailing how law is embedded in social and political processes; and the use of courts for ends other than those envisaged in law may offer us a picture of state law as a space that is "privatised" for these ends. Likewise, we may ask if there would be a different picture of feminist legal theories if one were to look at the *presence* of the sexual subaltern through the *suspension* of the law. Indeed, this book may be read on different registers to find provocation to think through specific campaigns, the nature of feminisms in India and indeed, the very method of doing feminist legal research.■

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An Introduction to Complex Texts

Shefali Jha

FEMINIST SOCIAL THOUGHT: AN INTRODUCTION TO SIX KEY THINKERS
By Vidyut Bhagwat
Rawat Publications, Jaipur and New Delhi, 2004, pp.374, Rs.675.00

Feminist Social Thought brings together a set of introductory essays on the work of six of the best-known feminist ideologues of the twentieth century. The attempt is to summarize in some detail the work of Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan, Kate Millett, Shulamith Firestone, Juliet Mitchell and Sheila Rowbotham. Given the scope of the thought and the fact that several books have been devoted to the analysis of each work, this is an arduous task, and one is bound to be disappointed if one is looking for an analytical or even critical approach. However, as stated in the preface, the book is intended as a textbook to be used as part of women's studies programmes at the undergraduate and perhaps postgraduate levels, and in this it succeeds.

While the 'Introduction' covers the socio-istorical and political context of the writing, ıch chapter consists of brief biographical information and detailed summaries of the main books written by each writer. Culled from the work of historians and some of the writers discussed in the book itself, the introduction charts the history of women's activism at various points in the history of Europe and the United States, and covers all of about three hundred years (the seventeenth to the twentieth century). It also briefly discusses ideological influences on the women's movement in the twentieth century, including the work of Freud, Herbert Marcuse, Louis Althusser, Jacques Lacan etc. The information can seem disjointed and abrupt in places, with connections missing, but this is inevitable given the nature of the exercise and the constraints it places on the author. An example is this introduction to Althusser: 'Like Lacan, Althusser asserted that the unconscious is structured like language. It is a structure, but not a subject. Althusser wanted to use the science of psychoanalysis in developing the science of ideological formation, the culture of modern capitalism'(p.52). This can be very confusing for the newcomer to theory, feminist or otherwise, as to who the book is aimed at. One is not given information about what Structuralism is, what the discussion on the 'subject' has been or what Althusser's distinctive ideas on 'ideological formation (s)' are.

The chapters summarize 'feminist classics' like *The Second Sex, The Feminine Mystique, Sexual Politics, The Dialectic of Sex, Women's Estate* and *Women, Resistance and Revolution*, apart from several others, by the respective writers. The summaries are organized around the major books in each case. For instance, the chapter on Betty Friedan discusses *The Feminine Mystique* in detail and *The Second Stage* briefly. However, the longest chapter, devoted to Simone de Beauvoir, deals only with *The Second Sex*; similarly, the chapter on Shulamith Firestone deals only with *The Dialectic of Sex*. These are fairly detailed summaries, organized thematically, and interspersed with critical comments from other writers from/on the feminist movement. In fact, each chapter has a separate section that includes a critical evaluation of the work in question. Comments from the other writers in the book are included as part of this 'evaluation' in almost every case, which is an interesting move, making historical and theoretical connections visible to the reader. Thus, Mitchell, Rowbotham and Firestone's views on Simone de Beauvoir's work and contribution to feminist thought are quoted, as are Mitchell's on Kate Millett's unsatisfactory 'dismissal' of Freudian psychoanalysis in the chapters on de Beauvoir and Millett respectively. Later, as one reads the chapter on Juliet Mitchell, for instance, these critical views are placed in the context of the writer's own work, which makes for an interesting interweaving of works and ideas. Typographical errors make the reading slightly more difficult when first mentioned, Friedan's book is titled *The Feminine Critique* (p.14), but the writing takes care to be accessible throughout, and succeeds in inspiring one to read the originals for oneself.

There is an inevitable Anglo-American bias in the enterprise, so that even the historical information is mostly about England and the United States, with a brief section being devoted to France specifically, and that because the French Revolution is the historical marker chosen for the section (pp.9-10). This is probably why even a cursory mention of French feminist writing, in the context of psychoanalysis, or the influence of Lacan, for example, is absent. Perhaps this is beyond the scope of the book, considering it is a very different strand of feminist thought from the one that the book is concerned with.

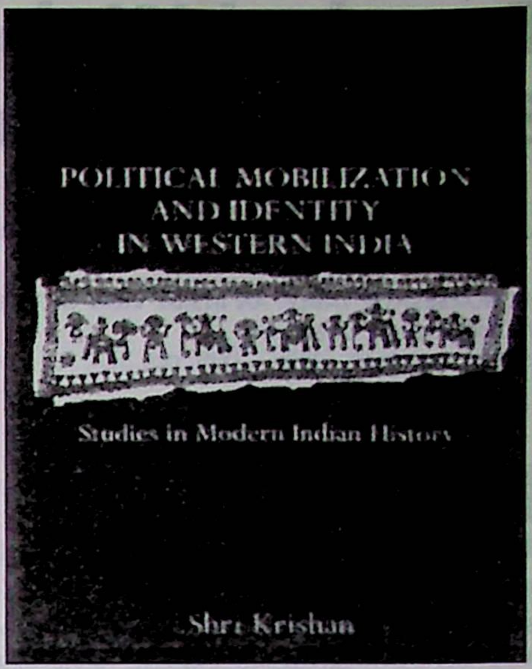
In the Preface (pp.ix-xi), Vidyut Bhagwat makes a case for the continued relevance of these 'classics of an earlier feminist revolution' for Indian feminism in general and women's studies departments in particular. A book like this, according to her, envisages a women's studies course that engages with feminism 'in different parts of the world', as opposed to 'retreating into narrow national feminisms'. More detailed comments, perhaps historical in nature, on the engagement of Indian feminism(s) with western feminist thought would have been of interest to students of the women's movement in India (as well as the West). However, Bhagwat's book can serve as an accessible starting point to anyone who is interested in some of the best-known works produced by second wave feminism in the West. The references will also be extremely useful in pointing the way towards further reading and research. Faculty in women's studies departments often lament the dearth of teaching material for their courses. Written by an experienced teacher of women's studies and feminist researcher, *Feminist Social Thought* should be a very welcome addition to the curriculum.■

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How History Is Read

Aditya Nigam

POLITICAL MOBILIZATION AND IDENTITY IN WESTERN INDIA, 1934-37
By Shri Krishan
Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 279, Rs 380.00



The volume under review is the seventh in a series on modern Indian history, edited by well known historian Professor Bipan Chandra and two of his illustrious former students, Mridula and Aditya Mukherjee. Between them they represent what was once the unchallenged school of nationalist historiography and have acquired the formidable reputation of crusaders on behalf of that particular way of understanding modern Indian history.

The present volume too is a part of that crusade, marked by the shrillness of its missionary ardour. There is nothing really to quarrel about with the author so far as his discussion of 'mobilizational politics' is concerned. The book, apparently about "political mobilization" and "identity" in western India, is less about exploring the relationship between such mobilizations (nationalist, by definition, in that period) and the quest for identity; it is, rather, about knocking down perceived enemies of the kind of history that the author wishes to uphold.

And of course, as they say, all is fair in love and war. So, we need not even feel compelled to represent the position of the supposed opponent with any degree of fairness or accuracy. In fact, one often begins to wonder whether the kinds of misrepresentation/s of the adversary's position that one encounters in texts such as these are a consequence of a deeper problem with the act of reading itself. In an ironical way, this problem of (mis)reading only confirms the point repeatedly made by the adversaries – the postmodernists, the Subaltern studies historians, and what have you! For it is precisely the act of meaning-making, completely liberated from the constraints of the written word, that makes such 'readings' possible. Here we have the true 'postmodern' reader.

Let us however, stay close to the text in order to ward off the ghost of postmodernism; let us take up a concrete instance for discussion. Let me add before that that this is just one instance among many and that where it comes to theory and theoretical questions, the author is at his liberated best. In a discussion of James Scott the author takes Douglas Haynes and Gyan Prakash to task for "crediting him" with shifting attention away from confrontationalist protest (and) organized struggle…to 'everyday forms of resistance' (p. 34). Thereafter he proceeds to assert that actually "there is no novelty in Scott's analysis" because "Robert Redfield had (already) stressed the role of 'self and community insulation devices' in peasant cultures. (p. 35) I do not wish to enter into the question of novelty for the moment but want to underline a couple of objections that the author has to James Scott. His major 'theoretical' objection is that "Scott's analysis draws heavily from Foucault and Giddens' notion of power, which themselves are problematic" (p. 35). In the first place, this is a factually incorrect statement. For one thing, Foucault and Giddens hold two very different, one might say polar opposite, views on power. If power, for Giddens, is centrally tied to the question of agency and the agent, to Foucault it represents a relation which constitutes individuals as subjects and agents. To Foucault there is no 'agency' that is prior to power relations. But we shall let that pass for this is not the place for an elaborate discussion of this question. More to the point here is the fact that the James Scott who wrote the work in question, (*The Weapons of the Weak*), has absolutely nothing to do with Foucault or the tradition that he represents. If anything, he is an admirer of historians like Marc Bloch and E.P. Thompson. His interest in the silent and oft-unrecognized forms of struggle emerge from that universe. To argue that these invisible forms be brought to light is hardly an argument against the importance of studying the more visible forms. But this is precisely what Shri Krishan reads in Scott and argues that "the role of overt and collective and organized forms of popular mobilizations *cannot be ignored*" (p.35), as though Scott were suggesting something to that effect.

However, as the author moves into the substantive parts of his book, he takes up cudgels against those historians who fix their gaze on the "more turbulent periods of history". "There is a crop of historians," he says, "who idealize these traditional sporadic, sudden, catastrophic and violent modes of activities of the peasantry" (p. 98). Not only do they, according to the author, "idealize" sudden, spectacular forms, they also "think of [past tradition] as rigid, fixed and unchangeable entities" (p. 98-9). He then brings a further charge against such historians: Such "historiography *assumes a kind of unique collective subjectivity of the oppressed* and dominated classes which acts in opposition to the elite" (p. 39). One guess to the reader, as to who these historians could be? Of course, they are the "Subaltern historians", so what if you can't recognize them in these descriptions! After all they are the ever slippery postmodernists, aren't they?

Now, as opposed to the Subalterns who assume a "unique collective subjectivity", the author claims: "Our contention is that the 'people' are not a monolithic group and can be divided into innumerable subsets, according to attributes of class, wealth, resources, age, sex, character types…" (p.91). Is there something amiss here? Weren't we told that it was the 'subalterns' who were guilty of "idealizing" the fragment? Keep guessing.

In the meantime, before we wind up, one point should be clarified. Shri Krishan's critique of historians who 'idealize' spectacular forms of popular politics does not mean he is advocating a closer look at the non-spectacular, more invisible forms that Scott urges us to do. He is rather, referring to those periods of the nationalist struggle when primarily legal forms such as petitioning and utilizing colonial legality for gaining concessions were the main forms of struggle (p. 123). These are periods that are important for the author – and indeed for the series editors – because in such situations, "we come across many instances where the 'subaltern' groups willingly accepted the Congress 'elite' leaders as mediators, arbitrators and settlers or their local grievances" (Ibid.). These are important periods because they once again restore the 'agency' of the Congress nationalist leaders, and show how "indispensable" they were for the subaltern sections of the population.

Lest there be any misunderstanding, at one point the author says categorically that "we are not contesting the distinction between the nationalism of the leadership and that of the masses" because "the former are bound to be more explicit, articulate, rational, logical and structured than the latter, which would tend to be inarticulate, sub-verbal or even mythic, archaic and symbolic" (p.92). The problem is that "subaltern historiography misses *the dialectical link* between the leader and the led through the mediation or ideology and organization" (Ibid). What better illustration of the "dialectic" of the leader and the led can there be than the one where the "subaltern groups willingly accept" the leadership of the Congress nationalists?■

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Tangled Webs In A Global Sanctum Sanctorum

K.P. Fabian

THE HORSESHOE TABLE: AN INSIDE VIEW OF THE SECURITY TABLE
By Chinmaya R. Gharekhan
Pearson Longman, Delhi, 2005, pp. 328, Rs. 550.00

There is a perfect fit between the author and the theme he has chosen to write on. Chinmaya Gharekhan of the 1958 batch of the Indian Foreign Service has established a well deserved reputation for his professional competence, integrity, and superb navigational skills in the often treacherous waters of diplomacy. As India's Permanent Representative to the U N in New York for six years, he has presided over the Security Council twice. Each presidency lasts a month. Later, he was appointed by Secretary General Boutros Boutros Ghali as his Senior Political Advisor. Ghali was averse to attending the closed, 'informal' meetings of the Security Council and appointed Gharekhan to represent him in such meetings where decisions were taken, to be ratified at the 'formal' meetings to be held subsequently.

The book is timely as the global citizen is increasingly concerned about the delay in reforming the UN system in general and the Security Council in particular. In fact, there is a growing body of opinion that the UN might have outlived its essential utility as an instrument to prevent war, mediate over conflicts, contributing towards the emergence of a reasonably peaceful world order to replace the current disorder. It should be noted that the specialized agencies that take care of the non-political sectors are much more purposeful and effective than the Security Council . Ghali in his foreword has commended the author for giving "an intimate, honest, and highly professional account of the manner" in which the Security Council conducts its business. The author kept notes throughout and his account is rich in details such as the date, time, and the identity of the persons involved, and often the very words they used.

The author has wisely chosen a thematic approach. The first chapter is an excellent introduction into the mysteries of the Security Council. There are two chapters dealing with Iraq starting from the invasion of Kuwait in 1990. Developments in the former Yugoslavia take up another two chapters. Libya (the Lockerbie disaster), the Middle East,and the Rwanda genocide take a chapter each. The election of Ghali in 1991 and of Annan in 1996 are narrated in a manner that makes the reader feel that she too was present with the author. In the final chapter, the author shares with the reader his thoughts on the reform of the Council. While dealing with the themes, the author has used a logical approach, by giving a brief historical background to start with, followed by an account of what happened at the Security Council, and he concludes with his own reflections.

The author has given us an example of the sense of humour of the secretariat. After every meeting of the Security Council, whether formal or informal, the Secretariat prepares a summary for internal use. On June 9,1994 as the Rwanda genocide was entering the third month, the Security Council met informally. There was much good humour, the summary noted. That humour held up remarkably well as the Council "engaged in its favorite pastime of drafting, drafting and redrafting a text that had already been drafted, drafted and redrafted countless times already during the many hours the working group had met yesterday ……… the members seem to be agreed that a fine draft is like a fine painting in that one can never be sure when it is finished. They finally ran out of steam a mere two hours after the afternoon round had begun, with a mere two 'bouts de phrase', neither of them particularly substantive, to show for all their effort."

The chapter on Gulf War 1991 throws much light on the geometry in the unipolar world where only the motion permitted by the hegemonic power can take place and any object that seeks to move in any other way is punished. Of course, the author does not use the term ' unipolarity' or 'hegemonic power'. He rightly mentions that the US had made up its mind to use force against Iraq " to attain its objectives—control over the second richest oil reserves in the world, establishment of base facilities in the region(Osama bin Laden, the implacable enemy of American presence in Saudi Arabia, had not yet emerged on the scene), removal of Saddam Hussein— *it needed* time to mobilize and deploy its forces, to secure basing facilities in Iraq's neighbouring countries and to build a political and military coalition." (Italics added.) The clear implication is that all that was enacted at the UN was meant to give the time to mobilize, and to

The book is timely as the global citizen is increasingly concerned about the delay in reforming the UN system in general and the Security Council in particular. In fact, there is a growing body of opinion that the UN might have outlived its essential utility as an instrument to prevent war, mediate over conflicts, contributing towards the emergence of a reasonably peaceful world order to replace the current disorder.

manufacture some justification for the intended war.

The account given by the author of the 'marvelous job' done by US Secretary of State James Baker, ably assisted by Ambassador Tom Pickering, in building up support for the resolution authorizing the use of military force (678) in the Security Council is interesting, but rather incomplete as narration. We are told that Baker spoke to his Malaysian counterpart while he was having dinner in a restaurant in Tokyo. " Other foreign ministers were similarly got hold of without consideration for the time of the day or night." In his book *The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War and Peace,1989-1992* Baker gives a slightly different version. He set out on an 18-day odyssey to twelve countries. "I met personally with all my Security Council counterparts in an *intricate process of cajoling, extracting, threatening, and occasionally buying votes.*" (Italics added.)

There is a deeper sense in which the author's account is incomplete. He never pauses to raise the fundamental question about the justification under the charter for the American-led war on Iraq in 1991. After all, the UN was founded by "We, the peoples of the United Nations" to save the succeeding generations from the "scourge of war." There is no mention at all of the efforts put in by Arab states such as Jordan right at the beginning of the Kuwait crisis to make Iraq withdraw from Kuwait. Of course, the author is not supposed to give us a detailed account of the Gulf War , but it is troubling to note that he has confined himself to pointing out that the Americans never offered any explanation for not obtaining "the determination under Article 42." In plain English, the Americans did not bother to argue that the economic sanctions had failed to deliver the sought-after result and that therefore there was no choice but military action. Nor does the author point out that there is no clause in the charter to 'outsource' military action as was done under 678.

The account of the Rwanda genocide(1994) is rather puzzling. There is no single reference to Kofi Annan who was heading the Department of Peacekeeping Operations that had the primary responsibility for the matter within the UN secretariat. The interested reader will have to Google for a report by the Ingvar Carlsson Committee's report (S/1999/1257) to be told of the failure of that Department to make a correct political assessment of the situation in Rwanda before the genocide and after it started.

The author argues, rather unconvincingly, that the UN could not have done much to prevent the genocide or to stop it once it started. His reference to the possible loss of "precious lives" of the UN soldiers in case the UNAMIR(United Nations Assistance Mission in Rwanda) had been strengthened in time, might give the unintended impression that the over 800,000 lives of the Rwandans killed were less precious. In fact, one wonders to what extent the interlocutor-wordsmiths around the Horseshoe Table did actually care? The excerpt from the summary of the 'informal' meeting of the Council given above indicates much more than the sense of humour of the secretariat in such situations. Most of the wordsmiths were too preoccupied with shifting the blame away from themselves to do anything to stop the genocide. They never looked at the painting as a whole. They only saw the small portion they painted and repainted.

The chapters on the election of the Secretary General are superb. Ghali was elected only because the US and UK had not anticipated his election. If they had, they might not have failed to use their veto against him.

Chinmaya Gharekhan has made a significant contribution to the literature on the Security Council and this eminent insider's book will be read with much interest and benefit by the global citizen who by necessity has to remain an outsider to the mysteries of the Security Council. Even the 'insider' community in India and elsewhere will find the book of compelling interest.■

K.P.Fabian is the author of *Commonsense on War on Iraq (2003).*

Schooling and Financing

Vimala Ramachandran

THE ECONOMICS OF ELEMENTARY EDUCATION: THE CHALLENGE OF PUBLIC FINANCE, PRIVATE PROVISION AND HOUSEHOLD COSTS
Edited by Santosh Mehrotra
Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2005, pp 328, Rs. 640.00

The edited volume is based on the data generated through Cost and Finance Study commissioned by UNICEF Delhi. Unlike a range of other surveys since the PROBE report of 1999, the value of this study is that it covered both provision of schooling (government and private) and financing by the government as well as households. The introduction by Santosh Mehrotra gives a cursory overview of the main findings as well as the key issues debated in recent literature on elementary education. Among the important issues flagged in that while enrolment rates went up through the 1990s appointment of teachers did not keep pace (leading to overcrowding of school and classrooms especially in the northern states); growth of private schools and rural/urban as well as caste specific differences in access to private schools; government expenditure on elementary education; household expenditure and so on. The overview looks at teacher shortages in conjunction with evidence of teacher absenteeism. The introduction also delves on the fiscal crisis in many states and how that has affected allocation of resources by state governments.

The introduction is followed by state specific chapters covering Uttar Pradesh (Ravi Srivastava), Bihar (Anup K. Karan and Pushpendra), Rajasthan (Sunil Ray), Madhya Pradesh (P.R. Panchmukhi), Assam (Raghabendra Chattopadhyay), West Bengal (Tapas Mazumdar) and Tamil Nadu (Jandhyala B. G. Tilak and A.M. Nalla Gounder). The above scholars are eminent economists and bring to this volume a comprehensive analysis of the fiscal situation in the state and have tried to estimate the cost of UEE in each of the states. Another interesting information compiled in this book pertains to rural-urban differences with respect to the spread of private schools. As the government information system does not generate data on private unaided (unregistered included) schools – the finding that the share of private unaided school in urban areas is high – 33.5% in UP 32.4% in Rajasthan, 28% in Bihar, 19.33% in Assam, 17% in AP and only 3% in West Bengal.

The chapter on Bihar is perhaps the most comprehensive and particularly interesting as it reveals the caste-wise situation of enrolment and retention by different kinds of schools. It is indeed noteworthy that while close to 50% of the forward community children study in private (aided and unaided) schools only 19.7% of SC and 25% of ST have opted out of government schools (p. 115). The chapter also reveals the continued practice of untouchability in schools and the prevalence of social discrimination in the administration.

Most chapters argue for greater decentralization and actual transfer of powers / authority to local self-government institutions. The editor laments, "Despite the existence of Panchayati raj Institutions for over a decade state governments have shown little interest in transferring funds, functions and functionaries..." While this is certainly a desirable step forward the authors of different state-specific chapters and the editor could have delved into the inherent contradiction between committees and forums like the School development and Management Committees (SDMC) or Village Education Committees (VEC) and the panchayati raj institutions (PRIs). The hard reality is that decentralization and community participation mechanisms in elementary education have consciously bypassed elected bodies. There is a huge gap between the rhetoric of decentralization and the reality of centralized control. The Panchayats have very little powers vis-à-vis the schools and given that the teachers are appointed and managed by the mainframe administration, the Panchayats do not have any control over them. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan consciously promotes community groups outside the purview of the Panchayats. The mid-day meal scheme is implemented through the panchayat in few states with others relying on women's self-help groups, mother's committees and so on. It is rather naïve to put the blame on the state governments. Given that the editor is a political scientist a discussion on the real politics of decentralization could have added immense value to this volume.

Most states appoint parateachers or contract teachers. In many states the panchayat are involved in identification and payment. While the authors point out that this decision may have been taken for fiscal reasons – the distribution of such teachers could have been discussed. Do rural, tribal or urban schools catering to the very poor have a disproportionate number of such teachers? The chapters fail to outline the non-fiscal dimension of lower paid contract teachers and how it has been a controversial

Getting together such eminent economists is creditworthy. But it would have been even better if they were nudged to go beyond a mechanical presentation of information or better still they could have been paired with educationists who are able to go beyond numbers and comment on why and how increased investment and provisions by way of teachers, infrastructure, incentives and so on do not translate into learning outcomes. Why is it that the same kind of investment yields differential results in the states?

issue among educationists. Most recently the CABE and the revised draft of the Right to Education bill have highlighted the equity implications of differentially qualified / trained teachers and their distribution across different kinds of schools.

With the exception of Bihar, other chapters are mechanical presentation of data gathered in the survey. These chapters are technically competent but do not give any insights into the texture. The data collected is no doubt rich but efforts to weave in qualitative insights would have certainly made these chapters far more interesting. Equally, the editor could have tried to pull together the volume in a more imaginative and engaged manner. The additional edge is missing. The book outlines and reiterates the oft-repeated issues and concerns without exploring the nuances or going into the root of the matter.

Getting together such eminent economists is creditworthy. But it would have been even better if they were nudged to go beyond a mechanical presentation of information or better still they could have been paired with educationists who are able to go beyond numbers and comment on why and how increased investment and provisions by way of teachers, infrastructure, incentives and so on do not translate into learning outcomes. Why is it that the same kind of investment yields differential results in the states? Some engagement with the larger socio-political environment and also administrative culture that results in such differences would have added great value to this volume. This is particularly important in today's India where there is so much interest in larger governance issues and how they impact on the social sectors. For example even a cursory look at figures show that investments have certainly gone up, but we know little about what these funds have gone into. Over 90% of state expenditure in education goes into salaries. Most investment in teacher training comes from central grants – but these funds come with a top-down training regime. Similarly other qualitative inputs also come with strings attached. The authors and the editor could certainly have explored new dimensions instead of sticking to the well-trodden path.

The editor could have made that little extra effort which would have made a big difference to the relevance of this book. The quantitative and qualitative information generated in the UNICEF survey could have been leveraged far more effectively. As a result it does not add significant value to the outstanding book on a similar theme also brought out by Sage Publications edited by A Vaidyanathan and Dr. Gopinathan Nair. (*Elementary Education in Rural India – A Grassroots View*, New Delhi, 2003).■

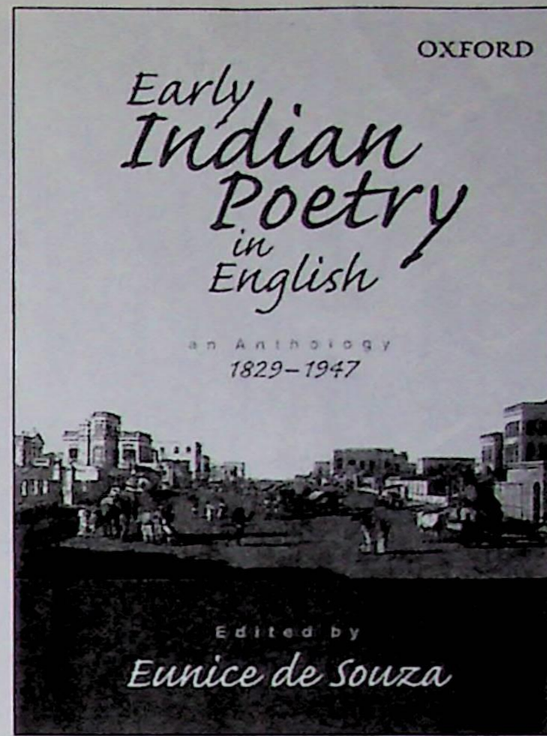
Vimala Ramachandran, has been working at the Educational Resource Unit on elementary education, girls' education and women's empowerment issues. She has extensive experience in qualitative research and process documentation.

Of Bards and Bad Press

Rosinka Chaudhuri

EARLY INDIAN POETRY IN ENGLISH 1829 - 1947
Edited by Eunice De Souza
Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2005, pp. 341, Rs 475.00

TORU DUTT: COLLECTED PROSE AND POETRY
Edited by Chandani Lokuge
Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2006, pp. 405, Rs 650.00



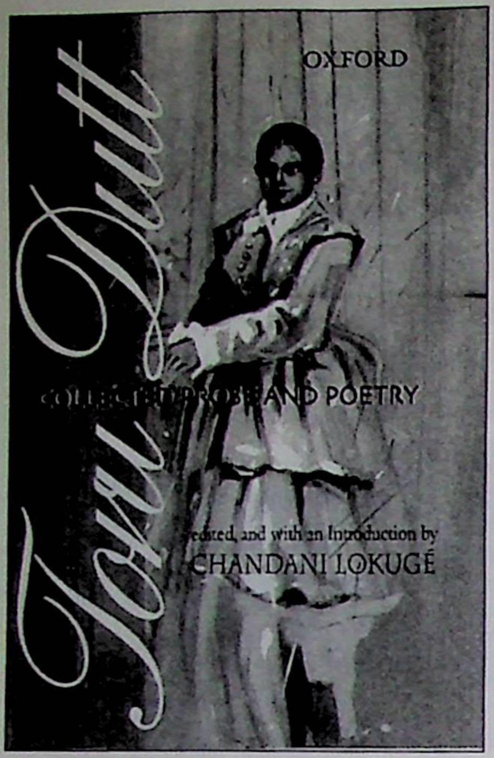
Eunice de Souza concludes her remarks in the introduction to *Early Indian Poetry in English* with a telling comment taken from a letter written by the Canadian novelist, Shauna Singh Baldwin. In the letter, the writer recounts being given, as a punishment for some misdemeanour, a long poem by Michael Madhusudan Dutt on Alexander to memorize and recite. This incident, the footnote adds, helped to develop in her a life-long interest in Alexander. De Souza dryly remarks that she hopes that 'at least some of the poems in this anthology will not meet this fate!'

'This fate' that has been the lot of nineteenth-century writers of English poetry in India for a very long time now is even more of a bottomless pit of ignorance and indifference than Eunice de Souza imagines, for Michael Madhusudan Dutt, in fact, never wrote a poem on Alexander. How Ms Baldwin managed to retain a life-long interest in Alexander from a poem titled 'King Porus', that glorified, in opposition to the colonizing emperor, the Indian patriot, Porus, will remain something of a mystery for us no less than for her. Putting aside whatever it tells us of Ms Baldwin's retentive powers, this incident remains emblematic of the 'bad press', as Eunice de Souza puts it, that nineteenth-century poetry has long received. She is also right in pointing out that our amnesia about this body of work is due, in most part, to the non-availability of the primary works in their complete and most interesting manifestations; anthologists down the ages have ignored 'the polemical, the political, the quietly personal' in favour of the mystical and oriental type of verse that they then felt, no doubt, was the embodiment of the essence of India. Thus Derozio, the first Indian to write English verse, has been read for generations in the 1923 and 1980 Oxford University Press editions, which culled the poems of their epigraphs, notes and footnotes, and chose only the most breathless of the shorter lyrics and sonnets. As a result the most fiercely political, witty and engaged poet of his time was reduced to a proto-Romantic, gazing upon the moon or the twilight in a daze—a situation that can only be rectified by a more persistent and sustained engagement with the entire corpus of his work, much of which lies scattered and uncollected in newspapers and journals of the time.

The effort that Eunice de Souza makes in this volume does not aim to fill the gap in its entirety, as that can only be done slowly and over time by researchers and scholars; it is enough that she points us in the direction we need to proceed. What is most refreshing about her method is that she approaches her material with the perceptivity of a poet and with a contemporary tone of voice that helps to relocate these poets in the context of our times. Even more importantly, she picks some of the most interesting and alive of the poems written in this period, drawing attention in her introduction, for instance, to the wonderful humour of Kasiprasad Ghosh's 'To A Dead Crow' ('Thy features, one and all, possess / Still, still their former ugliness'), a poem that has long been one of my favourites among the nineteenth-century corpus. All of Toru Dutt's greatest work is here, from 'Sita' and 'Our Casuarina Tree' to 'Sonnet- Baugmaree', while Joseph Furtado's poems were a complete revelation. A Goan poet whose first volume appeared in 1895, Furtado's bilingualism was a condition common, surely, to all the poets in this volume, yet he is the only one not only to have assimilated Indian words into his poems, but also to use the Indian-English rhythm and grammar that Nissim Ezekiel was later to do so well in 'Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S'.

All anthologies will tend to disappoint by virtue of being selective; here one misses Michael Madhu-sudan's brilliant afore-mentioned 'King Porus' or Manmohan Ghosh's 'April', for example, where he describes, in a modernist mode that owes something to Hopkins, the month in England.[1] Also, the dates in the title should read 1827 -1947, rather than 1829, as Derozio's first book was published in 1827. What is really useful and invaluable here also, however, are the appendices at the back, which include the endlessly quoted but very infrequently read Macaulay's Minute on Education, Henry Derozio's most moving and heartfelt letter of resignation, and Theodore Dunn's (still among the best anthologists of nineteenth-century poetry) essays. Eunice had wanted, in this section, to include a seminal essay by Toru Dutt on Henry Derozio, and it is the search for this essay that links, perhaps, this book to the next, Chandani Lokuge's edition of Toru Dutt's *Collected Prose and Poetry*.

Lokuge devotes a lengthy half-page paragraph to this essay in her introduction, apart from an entry in the 'Chronology', remarking that it was among Toru's 'first publications'. Two essays, she says, 'on Leconte de Lisle (1818-94) and Henry Vivian Derozio (1809-31) contributed to the *Bengal Magazine* when she was only eighteen years old', mark what an earlier scholar, Prabhu S. Guptara, writing in 1979, has called 'Toru's attempt to understand and come to terms with the "problem of being an exile, of writing in a language not one's mother-tongue, about a place that's not one's motherland"' (p. xxiv). There is a description of Derozio here, who apparently 'dressed like an Englishman, behaved like a dandy and rode through Calcutta streets on an Arab horse', that is not footnoted. The quotation is common enough for it to be almost apocryphal, however, but both quotations, in fact, are indicative of the trough in which much of nineteenth-century scholarship in this area has been sunk. The summary of Derozio reduces the man in his complexity to a caricature, somewhat laughable, and certainly not to be taken seriously, while the obsession in Guptara of a dislocated Toru Dutt, estranged from her



motherland and mother-tongue, are figments of a nationalized imagination that has long used such terms to glorify an organic connection between a writer and his language that few poets themselves will accede to.

Of more fundamental importance, however, is the fact that the essay on Henry Derozio in the *Bengal Magazine* of 1874 simply does not exist. Cited in numerous bibliographies and quoted by many a scholar, it has been a unique Borgesian text that has no material existence except in reference pages and citations. An extensive search for the essay in libraries across the world revealed finally, in fact, that all the issues of the *Bengal Magazine* of 1874 had the November and December issues missing — at Calcutta, London, Harvard, Washington and Chicago. I finally located it, much too late for Eunice, reprinted in the Calcutta journal, *Nineteenth-Century Studies*, and found, to my astonishment, that it was not on Derozio at all. It is in fact, on the Mauritian Creole poet Leconte de Lisle, and it is revealing that the quotation Lokuge uses here is from the head-note to de Lisle included in *Sheaf* rather than any direct quote from the essay itself, which I would surmise she has not actually seen.

Lokuge's introduction, therefore, has much to answer for; I would dispute, for instance, her claim in the opening sentence of it: 'Toru Dutt (1856-77) pioneered the Indian English literary tradition', a line repeated verbatim in the penultimate paragraph of the short biography that precedes it. That honour belongs, indisputably, to Derozio, whom Toru herself acknowledged as a forbear among Indian poets writing in English in the essay on de Lisle. Again, the claim made on behalf of Macaulay's Minute, that it 'propagated European education, Christianity, and socio-religious reform in Bengal of which women's reforms were many' (p. xv) is the very assertion Eunice de Souza takes care to refute in *her* introduction, quoting Jasodhara Bagchi against such 'postcolonial oversimplifications': 'What Macaulay proposed was only formal recognition by the state apparatus of a cultural input that was already entrenched in Bengal.' (p. xx) Assertions such as 'Govin Chunder Dutt admits that he loved Toru the least of his children' (p. xxx), with the relevant sonnet quoted in the footnote are embarrassing, as the lines clearly indicate his love for his son ('I love him most') but the phrases 'My next, the beauty of our home…' and 'And last of all, puny and elf-like…' quite obviously do not grade the children in order of loving but in order of their birth. Equally awkward are statements such as 'Soon after the publication of *A Sheaf* Toru and her father seriously took up the study of Sanskrit because they "had nothing to do"'. The phrase itself is taken from a letter written by Toru, a modest deprecation of a very serious effort that surely cannot be taken at face value.

Again, the explanation given by Lokuge of the reason for Toru spelling her name wrongly in Bengali, taken from what Lokuge calls Sanjukta Dasgupta's 'insightful observations' are completely mystifying to the ordinary Bengali reader. Harihar Das, her original biographer, had attributed the additional 'o'*kar* around the first letter of her name to her poor knowledge of Bengali. Dasgupta says, in a private letter quoted by Lokuge, that Toru uses it 'to project a preferred signature effect', and that this would 'change the name slightly from Toru to "Tooru"' which is closer to the 'romanized version of the Bengail (sic) name "Toroo". (p. xxxvii) To a Bengali, however, all that this additional 'o' indicates is a mis-spelling based on the sound of the word 'toru' as it is pronounced in Bengali, which often gives a rounded 'o' sound where none exists in the spelling; in Dasgupta's incomprehensible explanation, however, we arrive from 'postcolonial oversimplifications' at unnecessary postcolonial complications.

None of all this, however, can take away from the wonderful luminosity of Toru Dutt's own prose and poetry, whether in the now classic *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* or in the letters to Mary Martin and Clarisse Bader. The French novel, *The Diary of Mademoiselle D'Arvers*, is translated here by Prithwindra Mukherjee; how this translation compares with N. Kamala's, which was published by Penguin as a Modern Classic in 2004, is not discussed. The unfinished English novel, *Bianca, or the Young Spanish Maiden*, is made accessible to readers for the first time here, adding a further dimension to her *ouvre*. All of Toru Dutt's work seems to lead irrevocably to herself; in every inflection of the heroine's world view and experience, the author's own life seems to shine through. The touching description of Bianca as 'not beautiful… of middle height … her slight figure was very graceful; her face not quite oval; her forehead was low; her lips were full, sensitive and mobile, her colour was dark… her dark brown eyes … were large and full; in fact this pair of eyes and her long, black curls were her only points of beauty' seems indeed to indicate, as Lokuge says, that this was a self-portrait.

Over and above all else, though, it is to Toru Dutt's language that we must turn again and again in order to truly appreciate the sheer delight of her craft. Lokuge rightly draws our attention to her 'extraordinary word-pictures', akin to 'landscape painting', extracting the following description from her letters:

> There are so many shades of green; from the light, yellowish and bright one of the tamarind tree, to the dark-blue, sombre, green tint of the mango or the dusty brownish green of the sky-reaching casuarinas. Such a deep breath sweeps across the casuarinas in the still evening. It is like the heaving of the sea and brings St Leonards to my memory.

The correspondence between this passage and the poetry of 'Sonnet - Baugmaree' leaps out of the pages, but rather than capturing, as Lokuge says, 'the exuberant local setting with a corresponding Keatsian sensuousness that is also tinged with a Wordsworthian spiritual intensity' (p. xxvii), Toru Dutt's sonnet seems to prefigure the Imagist concern with the concrete image, with clarity, accuracy and simplicity. In "A Few Don'ts of an Imagiste" (1913), Ezra Pound defined "image" as something that "presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time", and Toru's poem, with its clear, visual images, fresh rhythms, and muscular, intelligent, unusual lines such as that which describes the seemul ('Red, - red, and startling like the trumpet's sound'), if they evoke any nineteenth-century figure at all, bring to mind the figure of Emily Dickinson, many continents away, but like Toru, perhaps, as described by her father: 'Self-willed and shy, ne'er heeding that I call, / Intent to pay her tenderest addresses / To bird or cat, - but most intelligent…'.■

Reference

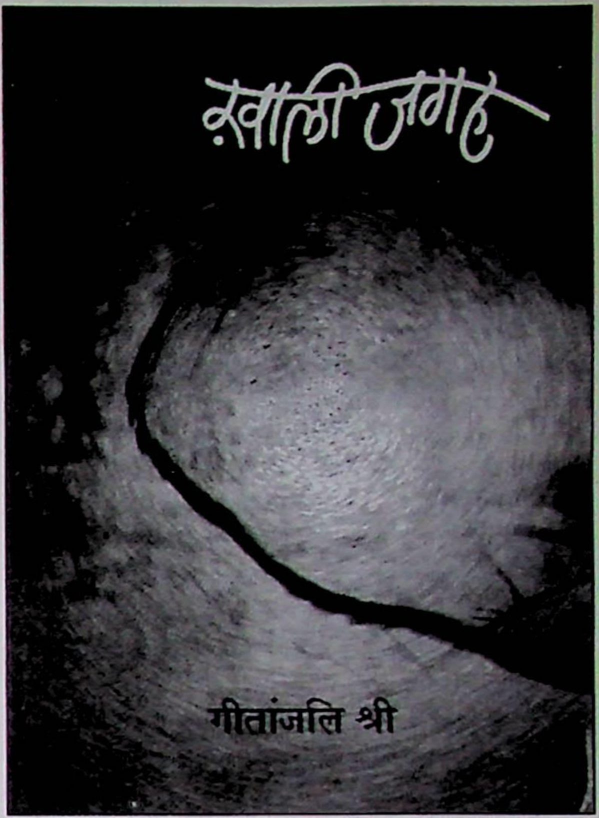
1 Manmohan Ghose, *Songs of Love and Death*, with an introductory Memoir by Laurence Binyon (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1926).

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A City in the Heart

Sara Rai

KHALI JAGAH
By Geetanjali Shree
Rajkamal Prakashan, New Delhi, 2006, pp.244, Rs.250.00



Geetanjali Shree breaks new ground with her novel *Khali Jagah* or *The Empty Space.* And not only in the context of her own writing that has over the years traversed much terrain, finding paths adventurous and often surprising. There is little, yet, in Hindi writing that has dealt with the shadow that looms over our modern lives, the fear of bombs and all that they bring in tow; the pain, the confusion, the fracturing of lived reality, the sense of the transience of our world itself that may be blown apart in one fatal moment by meaningless mad forces. This is a world in which violence has become banal, an everyday affair that completely throws off balance routines and patterns of existence. Indeed, no set patterns can be said to exist in the changed scenario. If there is anything that makes the modern world smaller and brings distant places closer to each other, it is this, the possibility of a terror attack. Is this one of the ironies of globalization? Because it is not as if the legion of terror is located in any one place. Like a cancer, it can spring up at will. This grim reaper culls with an absurd and unfailing sense of equality; no considerations of colour, creed, race or class seem to count for anything here. A terror attack could take place anywhere, at any time, in the safest, the remotest of areas and change human equations eternally, irredeemably.

Geetanjali's new novel is about a bomb blast and its tragic aftermath. An eighteen year old son insists, despite parental resistance, on going to study at the famous university of a town where his father comes from. It is as much a quest for an education as it is for his roots. Barely has he reached there than a bomb blast happens in the safest and most unexpected place, the cafeteria of the university where this kind of event has no precedent. The debris of devastation goes flying in all directions, in a moment become eternity, with people stuck in that moment. Fire, ash, scraps of roasted flesh. Everything is smashed to pieces, people, fans, furniture and food; all tossed about "like an argument in the cosmos". He is killed, naturally, and the cafeteria burnt to the ground, looking like "the black dream of an artist". What follows is the total objectification of human life, with the counting up of unidentified body parts that could, had they been added together, and if the destroyer knew how to create, have constituted whole human beings.

The café is burnt to cinders along with people, chairs, tables, food, but miraculously, what survives is an empty space, just big enough to hold a three year old, who seems to have no claimants, no past and whom the mother, having tragically lost her own son, brings home to raise as a son, his life beginning where the other's ends. And it is a life, in a sense, of standing in for the dead boy, of taking his place not only in the world but just as much, although they never verbally acknowledge it, in the parents' lives. Perhaps this is the point where the narrative becomes one of belonging and exclusion, of acceptance and rejection. For the dead son belongs in ways that the one alive can never do, and his haunting presence is palpable in his very absence. He is "the golden boy of the future", who has crossed over, in a single dismembered moment, into the hereafter and throughout the book he continues to hover in a sort of frozen forever over the lives of those left behind.

He is present in the mother's silence, in her refusal to hear or see anything in the outside world as she recedes deeper and deeper into her own fugitive shadowed eyes. He is present in the blast that keeps reverberating within the father long after the actual moment is past, blowing to pieces all hope, desire, laughter, curiosity, quiet, all that goes into the making of a human life, leaving the father suspended "in pieces" somewhere in the universe. And the dead boy lives in the new son as the negation of himself, the son who is never free to be simply his own self, but must forever carry the burden of a promising life cut short in its prime. His is a life that is blighted, doomed from the beginning as it were, to being rejected by any and every thing that matters, denied a life that he can call his own, denied even, by a weird quirk of circumstance, the woman he loves, who turns out to be the lover of his dead brother. So utter, so total is his rejection that even the second bomb that explodes in one of the last scenes misses him, going past him to reach a more 'worthy' target. He survives, but is not granted a life of any substance that may justify his survival. And so, paradoxically, the living son is absent even as he is the protagonist of the novel who "grows and so the story grows".

So much for the 'plot' of the story. Is this what the novel is then, a dark recounting of a modern tragedy? Well it is, but not only that. What makes the story different is the telling of it. As if to suggest that the fragmentation and disjuncture of contemporary reality is such that no linear style or formal structure would be appropriate to depict it, Geetanjali flouts conventional vocabulary and syntax, writing a staccato prose that moves along in jerks and pauses, using association of ideas and metaphors, swerving into rhyming or alliterative phraseology that creates in turn cadences resonant with the lilt of the colloquial. There is an alternating use of dialect, even snatches from Hindi film songs that proscribe a descent into the prosaic, giving the writing a lively energy. At points in the book there is a refrain of humour that, given the theme, can only be a sort of black humour, serving to highlight the pain that forms the essential core. Thus, the narration weaves in and out of the characters' mental and emotional worlds, allowing them to make or, as the case may be, break their connection with objective reality. The bomb that explodes in the very opening of the book is the central metaphor that is echoed again and again in the motifs of balloons, balls, idlis and other round objects, and the blast will continue to resound throughout entire lives.

The very title, "The Empty Space", works like a metaphor, for what else is it? Is it not fortuitous, indeed improbable, that an empty space should have been left clear in the midst of

the rubble of destruction, where objects, and human beings shattered to smithereens go crashing through the air and where the eye sees nothing but charred remains and fountains of blood? So what is this empty space? Can it be the empty space that begins to stretch, end to end, in the lives of the mother and father after the death of the beloved boy, like vast tracts of desert land? Certainly there is emptiness in all that they do thereafter, vacuity even in the bizarre ritual of lovemaking that the father enters into with another woman, so that he may be able to sleep. But "the matchstick flares up and dies down"; a part of the body has imitated the action of living but life itself "remains impotent". It is possible that life in these arid times is an empty space anyway, devoid of meaning. And what of the boy who is brought home by the mother and takes the place of the dead son? Is he not, in his very shadowiness, an empty space? The book holds out many invitations for the willing to wander through in its pages.

A word about the topography of the novel. *Khali Jagah* is not set in a particular geographical location. There are no signposts; towns and streets have no names, there is a reluctance to mention the name of the country, even the characters resist nomenclature. It is intentional then. Perhaps the idea is to suggest the all-pervasive nature of the things that happen; such events cannot be circumscribed by geography. Naming the characters too would have given them an undesired specificity; after all, in these times, they could be just anybody. But another kind of geography keeps cropping up. There is a city inside the heart which sometimes fills with laughter and song, and another city outside that is grey like smoke, with "a sun without light". There is a place where "the water is full of stars", the water of forgetting; drinking it makes you forget the world. There is a white flower that wipes out all desire if you smell it. These are evocative images that go to make up poetic moments in the book. The past is a physical place and to return to it, the plane has to fly backwards, the air hostess to serve food backwards and so on.

There seems to be a sort of internalism at work here, delineating the mind as the space where all the action takes place. Thoughts are sometimes articulated in words that run together, said in the very process of being thought, caught in the moment of passing, as it were, before the mind has had the time to impose any order upon them. It is natural then, that there is no logical sequence or tidiness in the narration, the technique itself seeming to question the possibility of existence of a form adequate to present such a chaotic reality. This technique, while it imparts a certain spontaneity and immediacy to the writing, also runs the risk of making the text obtuse, needing some effort to decipher. It has to be said that for the most part the style works, but there are places where it may not, where the writing down of every passing thought may begin to seem a little excessive. The same could be said of the somewhat quirky humour that, taken in the context of the book, could appear to make light of moments that are deeply tragic, to descend into drollery. But then, these are dangers that anyone experimenting with form may well encounter. *Khali Jagah* is a book to be read, for the reader will find her reward in this very newness, this straying from conventional form.■

Sara Rai is a writer who lives in Allahabad and Delhi.

Book News

Archeology

Sengi (Gingee) A Fortified City in the Tamil Country by Jean Deloche is an abundantly illustrated book which is a result of several years of research on Sengi, immortalized by Desing's ballad, still popular in South India which is a significant place in Tamil country.
Institut Francais de Pondichery, 2005, pp. 392, price not stated.

Pondicherry Inscriptions compiled by Bahour S. Kuppusamy and edited by G. Vijaya-venugopal has a total number of 545 inscriptions gathered together.
Institut Francais de Pondichery, 2005, pp. 534, price not stated.

Cultural Studies

Anandamath on the Sacred Brotherhood by Bankimchandra Chatterji and translated with an introduction and critical apparatus by Julius J. Lipner, a complete and readable English version has an extensive introduction contextualizing the novel and its cultural and politial history.
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 316, price not stated.

Swami Vivekananda's Legacy of Service: A Study of the Ramakrishna Mission by Gwilym Beckerlegge.
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 292, Rs. 595.00

Fiction

Fragrance Beyond Borders by Amarendra Narayan is a story of spirited people whose positive outlook and dedicated efforts result in spreading the message of love and fraternity beyond borders.
Interlink Prosign Co Limited, Bangkok, Thailand, 2005, pp. 204, Bht 200.00

From the Ramparts by Ashok Mitra is a selection from the author's 'Calcutta Diary' in the *Economic and Political Weekly*.
Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 268, Rs. 450.00

Historical Studies

Beyond the Kings and Brahmanas of 'Ancient' India by Uma Chakravarti brings to light several crucial concepts and categories that make possible a sensitive delineation of social alienation, class antagonism and gendered violence in ancient Indian society.
Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 328, Rs. 595.00

International Relations

Impossible Allies: Nuclear India, United States and the Global Order by C. Raja Mohan examines the objective factors that are driving India and United States into each other's arms.
India Research Press, 2006, pp. 312, £31.50

Literature

Poems and a Novella by A.K. Ramanujan have four works that add yet another dimension to the rich contribution A.K. Ramanujan has made to Indian and American literature.
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 330, Rs. 550.00

Please note!

May 2006 issue will be published as South Asia Special No. VII. Kindly book your order for the copies.

Resonating A Moral Demand

Rakshanda Jalil

SEVASADAN
By Prem Chand. Translated by Snehal Shingavi with an introduction by Vasudha Dalmia
Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2005,
pp. 275, Rs. 325.00

Delivering the Presidential Address at the First Progressive Writers' Conference in Lucknow on 9 April 1936, Premchand said, "There have been many definitions of literature, but in my opinion the best definition of it is – 'the criticism of life'. Whether in the form of an essay or a poem, literature should criticise and explain life." Entitled *Sahitya ka Uddeshya* (The Aim of Literature), his speech makes a powerful and eloquent appeal for Indian literature to "mirror the truths of life" and to "develop a new sense of beauty". Socially and politically engaged literature, he believed, must contain "high thinking, a sense of freedom, the essence of beauty, the soul of creativity and the light that emanates from the truths of life." Completely in sync with the ideology of the Progressives who had adopted him as their patron saint, Premchand was, in many ways, a man ahead of his times. All through the 20s and the 30s, in story after story, he had taken up issues that not many had dealt with till then — untouchability, widow remarriage, women's rights and women's education, and most significantly, the position of women in 'civilized' society.

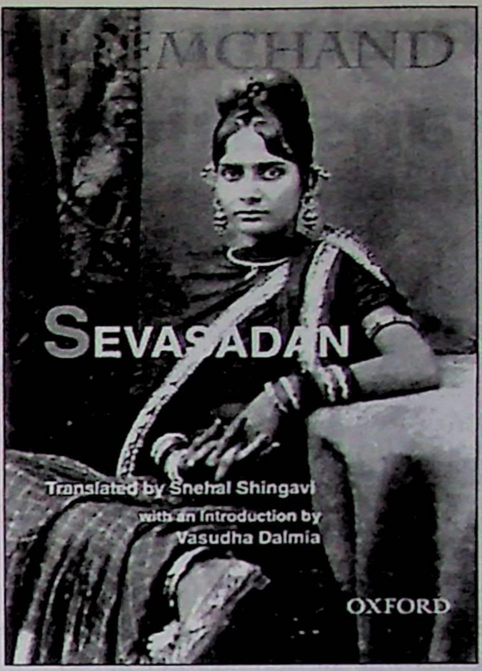
Relatively lesser known among Premchand's novels, *Sevasadan* has not previously been translated in India; in Pakistan, though it has appeared in translation as *The Courtesan's Quarter* (OUP, Karachi) under the series "Classics from South Asia and the Near East". Written in Urdu in 1917 under the somewhat titillating title *Bazar-e-Husn* (The Marketplace of Beauty), it had to wait till 1924 to be published in Urdu till a sufficiently intrepid publisher could be found for so bold a subject. In Hindi, however, it found a ready market and instant fame despite the sober and colourless title – *Sevasadan*, or 'House of Service' referring to the institution set up for the daughters of fallen women.

Located in Banaras, *Sevasadan* deals with the city's attempt to drive away its once-famous courtesans from the *chowk* and banish them to the city skirts. The courtesan of Premchand's time was a woman who, though sought out by men for her sophistication and allurement, might or might not sell her sexual services and was therefore not, strictly speaking, a prostitute though she was clearly a "fallen" or "immoral" woman. Swayed by the combined influence of new education, the Arya Samaj Movement, theosophy and public lectures, the city elders wished to remove these "fallen women" from their midst without really trying to understand what, in the first instance, caused their ousting from home and hearth. While making an impassioned appeal for social reform, Premchand reflects also on the marginalization of women that is the fall-out of cathartic acts of self-cleansing — on the part of society as well as its reformers and the 'victims' of reform.

Sevasadan is the story of Suman, a brahmin woman from a good family that has fallen on hard times, and married to a poor but 'respectable' man. Lured by the trappings of luxury and desperate for a better life, she leaves her humble home and ill-tempered husband and sets up an establishment in the courtesan's quarter of the city. Is it destiny, individual choice or society that puts a respectable woman in the marketplace where beauty is sought and sold? Premchand puts the blame squarely on society. His outrage at the perilous status of women in a patriarchal society is very real: "We are not farm animals that our parents can sell to anyone who turns us into his property." And, elsewhere, "Courtesans are merely a manifestation of our weaknesses, our social crimes, and of our outmoded traditions. Dalmandi is merely a profane reflection of our lives, the visible shape of our demonic acts. How dare we despise them? … Our social crimes are like a flame and these poor women are like straw. If you want a flame to die out, you need to keep it away from fresh kindling. Then it just dies off naturally."

Suman's descent into a life of sin is orchestrated by a combination of forces largely out of her control, but her later decision to forsake her life of depravity is entirely her own doing. Spurred by a movement led by the town's elders to remove the courtesans from the Dalmandi area in the hub of the city and banish them to the outskirts where their disgrace will not be a cause of public shame, she has a change of heart. She finds a temporary shelter in a widow's ashram, from where she is turned out by the very same townsfolk who had once sought her favours. Alone and penniless, she is forced to live with her sister and brother-in-law and work as a much-unappreciated slave in their home. Turned out from this last haven too, forsaken by all, she contemplates taking her life, but is rescued and eventually "rehabilitated" by being given charge to run a home for the daughters of courtesans.

Like Hardy's Tess in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Premchand's Suman's life too is marred by a single false step in a self-righteous and unforgiving world. It has the same Hardian quality of inexorable decline and unrelenting vicissitudes for one all too-human flaw. However, Premchand's greatness lies in the fact that he is no mere chronicler of human tragedy; he paints his central character against a rich and complex social tableau, propping his social criticism with socially viable solutions. The moralist in Premchand finds solutions to social ills. The beautiful and ambitious Suman who is blessed with a great and voluptuous beauty undergoes a transformation. From a fallen woman she becomes the pride of womanhood: "A lamp of purity shone through her instead of beauty and elegance."



Sevasadan exemplifies Premchand's dearly held belief that, collectively, society can bring about change from within: "Deeply longed for desires always come true. When a community is confident that you are its faithful servant, that you want reform, that you are selfless, it will readily help you. But this confidence never develops without a true desire for service. If a conscience is not clear and bright, it cannot be a beacon for others." Despite the sermonizing that mars some of his most trenchant social satire, Premchand is also capable of making the most powerful moral statements. It is important to realize that Premchand was way ahead of the writers of his time as, for example, when he makes Bholi, a courtesan, say, "This uncivilised custom of treating women as if they were second class citizens persists only in this country." And to think, this was being written in 1917!

Premchand died in 1936. Yet close to seven decades after his death his writing still speaks to us. It might appear a trifle didactic to the modern reader, even sentimental, but it makes a moral demand of us that cannot be ignored. It reaches out and appeals to all that is good and decent in us that is moved by injustice and inequality. It is here that *Sevasadan* scores despite its many shortcomings – both in its original and translated form. A slender story strung sparingly on the thread of social concern is, by its very nature, a fragile thing. In the hands of a social commentator such as Premchand writing in the 20s, Suman's story had a special resonance. Snehal Shingavi's translation, however, shows once again that translating Premchand is not without its pitfalls. What is perfectly acceptable in the Urdu/Hindi original can sound bungling, gauche or plain awful in English. Fidelity to text at the expense of readability makes her err on the side of absurdity. "May my eyes explode if I ever look at him!'

Rakhshanda Jalil is Media Coordinator, Jamia Millia Islamia. She translates from Urdu and Hindi and has published *The Temple and the Mosque*, a collection of ten stories by Premchand in English translation (HarperCollins, 1992).

Perennial Delights in Translation

A.N.D. Haksar

THE BHAGAVAD GITA
By Bibek Debroy
Penguin Books, Delhi, 2005, pp. 321, Rs. 250.00

KALIDASA'S TRIOLOGY
By Deepvali Debroy
Smriti Books, Delhi, 2005, pp. 136, Rs. 175.00

Both these books are fresh presentations of famous Sanskrit works for the English-reading public. The two writers, distinguished academics who are also husband and wife, had in the past jointly authored abridged translations of the Vedas and selected Upanishads and Puranas. Drawing further from the ancient language's treasure trove, they have now dealt separately with the best known of its scriptures and some classics from its literature.

Bibek Debroy's is a prose translation of the *Bhagavad Gita*. Each verse is translated separately, with the corresponding Sanskrit text on the opposite page for those familiar with the Devanagari script. "This is purely a translation" says the author. "To the extent interpretations are needed, they are in the notes". The latter also explain several technical terms occurring in the original text, some of which, like *dharma* and *yoga*, have been left untranslated.

Retold in almost fifty languages, the *Gita* is among the world's most translated books. Debroy lists 66 English-language translations while noting that the actual figure could well be upto a 1000! The translators, beginning with British official Charles Wilkins over 200 years ago, have included scholars and savants, philosophers and poets, religious and public figures in an almost ever-flowing stream. The present translation is itself the third brought out by the same publisher.

Why another translation when so many already exist? Debroy devotes the bulk of his introduction to this question. His unexceptionable reasons are: "Because the more the *Gita* is read the better. Because each generation should have its own translation and the English in some earlier translations now seems archaic. And because there is some reason for dissatisfaction with translations that are available".

In explaining his dissatisfaction, he opines that for 90 per cent of the *Gita's* text, there is little difference between the words chosen in different prose translations. The difference lies in the quality and range of notes which he claims set his translation apart from others. As for the remaining ten per cent, he has examined original verses with the language of various well-known translations in framing his own, separating translation from interpretation unlike many earlier works where the two tend to get mixed up. "And when there are questions about what has been done, as there are bound to be", he concludes candidly, "that is the point when you should produce your own translation. As a reader dissatisfied with what already exists. That was also the trigger here".

Set within these self-defined parameters, this is a smooth readable translation, its language reflecting both clarity and brevity. For a closer comprehension of the context it needs to be read with the notes which are also clear and informative though occasionally summary.

However, something more is needed to transmit the feel of the *Gita's* essential timeless message which has inspired and sustained countless people over the centuries. It reverberates in well known verses many know by heart, in which god speaks to man to assure and guide him in the dilemmas of life. Verses like 2.27, 4.7-8, 9.26-31, 18.65-66 and many others are not just dry discourse but high poetry, for which the language must correspond to the inspiration and not merely translate words. This aspect is missing here.

The challenge of conveying poetry, albeit of another order, through translation also surfaces in *Kalidasa's Triology*. This work presents three celebrated long poems by the most outstanding poet of classical Sanskrit. *Meghadootam*, the shortest and perhaps the most translated of the three into English, is a separated lover's appeal to a cloud to carry his message to his beloved. *Raghuvamsham*, much the longest and the least translated, narrates the history of the royal House of Raghu, its grand achievements and an extraordinary fall which really deserves a separate poem. *Kumarasambhavam* recounts the myth of the union, divine and human, of Shiva and Parvati which led to the birth of the god Kumara.

All three are marked by euphony and elegance in style, and vivid descriptions of nature's beauty infused with a sensitivity to human emotions. The first is a lyrical poem, its imagery flitting in and out of a single theme. The other two are epic narratives, replete with portrayals and reflections in a rich tapestry. Verses from all have been often quoted as models of poetic excellence.

Deepavali Debroy's is a mix of translation and adaptation in simple prose to enable a fresh look at these classics. The 121 *Meghadootam* verses are translated one by one, with brief explanations inserted within brackets where needed. For the two longer works, some verses are combined or retold in brief to maintain the narrative's overall flow. Several are discarded, for instance the much quoted very first line of *Raghuvamsham* putting forward the concept of harmony between word and meaning. Each poem is preceded by an introduction outlining its content and setting.

Like other ancient masters Kalidasa has tended to remain on a pedestal for the modern reading public. In making him more accessible with her book, Debroy tries to explain the beauty of his poems rather than convey their poetic sense and quality. This will help the interested reader seeking a first introduction to these classics. It contrasts with other efforts at bringing out the poetry of Kalidasa through English verse. Examples of this are Arthur Ryder's rendition of *Meghadootam* and John Brough's selection from *Kumarasambhavam*, both of which perhaps compromised with accuracy to impart some flavour of the originals' charm. To combine fidelity to content, form as well as flavour in English renditions of Sanskrit poetry is still a challenge to be overcome.■

A.N.D. Haksar is the compiler of *A Treasury of Sanskrit Poetry* (ICCR, 2002), and the translator of several Sanskrit classics, the latest being *Madhav and Kama* (Roli, 2006).

Flavour of the Region

Mahasweta Sengupta

PRATIDWANDI
By Sunil Gangopadhyay. Translated from the Bangla by Enakshi Chatterjee
Orient Longman, New Delhi, first published 1974, this edition 2005, pp.103, Rs. 195.00

MOSQUITO AND OTHER STORIES: GHANADA'S TALL TALES
By Premendra Mitra. Translated by Amlan Dasgupta
Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2004, pp.170, Rs. 200.00

The publishing industry in India these days is exhibiting a remarkable interest in publishing translated texts and there is every reason to be happy about the attention they are bestowing on regional language literatures. Though there is no doubt that the translation is always between one Indian language and English, at least the urge to translate into another language (which happens to rule the world!) certainly exhibits the pressure from below. The postcolonial drive to reclaim or revive the local, even when it is through the global and hegemonic English, certainly deserves to be congratulated by all readers who get to read these texts in translation.

It is really a matter of pride that the translation of Sunil Gangopadhyay's *Pratidwandi* has appeared in a second print in 2005. Undoubtedly, this is a matter of immense importance that a novel that mirrored the volatile and disturbed socio-cultural context of the sixties in Bengal and in many ways represented the postcolonial dilemma is still in demand in the translated version.

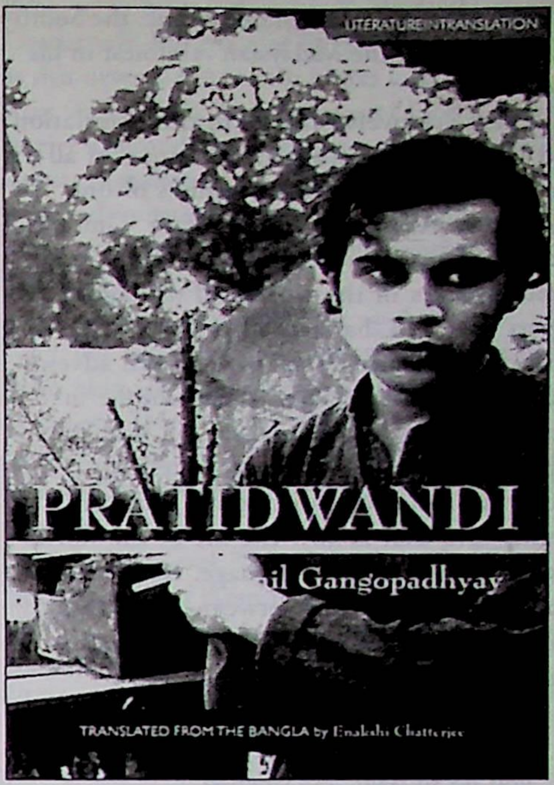
The original novel in Bangla captured the mind of readers because it was able to confer a form on the multitudinous experiences of frustration and despair of a family in the 1960's, an experience that was shared by many. Siddhartha, the protagonist, struggles to get over his bleak context; he fights against the corruption and control of socio-economic mechanisms that exploited the conflicting moral values of people. He is certainly romantic because he believed in his ability to "change" the system and his family suffers the onslaughts of a fast changing social structure where earlier values seem to hold little relevance.

The novel was very efficiently translated by Enakshi Chatterjee in 1974. She is a translator who seems to be very sensitive to the nuances of both Bangla and English and that shows in this text also. It is an excellent translation because it maintains a very cautious balance between the original Bangla text and the English version; the translation appears to be absolutely spontaneous and "natural" not because the translator wants to make it "readable" but because there is an effort to retrieve the life of the original. The translator admits that she found Sunil Gangopadhyay's *Pratidwandi* "presented hardly any problem for language transfer – it was eminently translatable. There is nothing that would seem alien to the reader; of course I mean only the Indian reader for whom the value system, the sense of honour, family pride, and the moral and ethical values are easily comprehensible. There is hardly anything which requires a footnote...."

The translator, therefore, enjoyed doing the work and she mentions this fact in the "Translator's Note" to the book: "I found it a thoroughly delightful experience." In fact, the translator's delight shows in the proficiency with which she handles the English language, it is fresh and crisp like a flowering plant. Look at the dialogue between Siddhartha and the three officers who were interviewing the candidates:

> One of the three members got up and came towards them. Siddhartha looked at him straight in the face. The gentleman asked, "What is it?"
>
> 'Sir, we have been standing for hours, there's no place to sit.'
>
> The gentleman smiled sweetly: 'You have to prepare for much worse in this job. If you can't bear this, well, then, I'm sorry for you, young man.'
>
> 'Sir, we can do some work standing, but we can't just stand around doing nothing!'
>
> 'Didn't I say – if you can't bear this, you're free to –'
>
> 'I'm speaking for all of us.'

The intensity of the Bangla words translated into English seems to have a life here and the sense comes out quite clearly. In fact, the translation captures the reader's attention with enormous power, even the Bengali reader finds it to be immensely readable and also true to the world of its origin. I am not advocating the often-criticized notion of "fidelity" here, but I certainly feel that translations have a responsibility to "belong" to the terrain of the original and not accommodate into the structures of the world of English. Do not forget to note that the title of the original has not been rendered into English and there is no footnote or explanation to tell the English reader what the word means.



A strong policy statement, indeed.

Another remarkable translation from Bangla published in 2004 was capable of transporting me back to my childhood, when the days and nights were filled with the humour of Ghanada and Tenida. I had often thought about suggesting Ghanada stories to others who happen to be more proficient in English than in Bangla, but never actually did that because it was, I thought, almost impossible to translate the humour of Ghanada or Tenida into the right kind of English. I feel very happy that Amlan Dasgupta has dared to translate Premendra Mitra's fantastic stories in the most enjoyable manner; here at last one relishes the flavour of Ghanada's 'typical' humour along with his 'typical' eccentricities.

Premendra Mitra's short stories deal with the very characteristic world of the Kolkata "mess" – a place where a huge population of male office-goers and other working-men lived away from their own homes. This translated text contains an excellent Introduction to the Ghanada stories and one has to congratulate Amlan Dasgupta for providing such a wonderful account of the world that produced these stories. The translator says that:

> I have attempted a fairly literal translation on the whole, but have occasionally thought it necessary to try to convey the spirit of the stories rather than the meaning of the words.

In fact, the atmosphere of the mess breathes through the translation; the all-male residence where Ghanada lived appears to be the most probable address to look into for a fantastic account of adventure and suspense. As the translator says "In all the stories included here, Ghanada never steps out of the house – apart from an occasional evening constitutional perhaps – though we are taken on whirlwind

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tours of the Arctic and the Antarctic, the South Sea Islands and the Malaysian rainforest in his tales."

There are twelve stories in this translation and interestingly enough, the names of all these stories except the last one is of one word, like 'Mosquito', 'Pebble', or 'Umbrella'. The stories of course are about remote places in the world, all through the expert gaze of Ghanada; as the translator tells you, they "combined science, travel, adventure and fantasy, making them unique in Bengali fiction." The translation is able to capture the light-hearted story-telling nuances of the Bengali original quite efficiently and that is how the life of the stories thrive in the English language. Read this wonderful altercation between Bapi Datta, the suburban fellow who was a "champion eater" and the inimitable Ghanada:

> An intense frown creased Ghana-da's face. 'It's quite late', he said. 'Why don't you go to bed?' He yawned.
>
> We got nervous, but Bapi Datta wouldn't give up. 'Why a snuff box?' he asked. He seemed to have got over the loss of his four ducks.
>
> 'Why? Because on the seventeenth of July, 1935, I was lost in a blizzard on the highest plains in the world and nearly lost my life; because the greatest villain in the world, Von Bruhl, was after me with his henchmen;
> because there seemed no way of retrieving lost honour even at the cost of my life;
> because I saw a ghost near the Gurla Pass at a height of 16, 010 feet; because I used my last bullet to shoot the *changu* – that's why!

The whole passage actually initiates the audience to several different problems that would need another spate of time to be talked about so that Ghanada held the magic wand of storytelling. In English, it seems to be the most natural thing here that he would introduce so many new topics into the conversation at once, with the most professional expertise and efficiency normal to Ghanada only. Amlan Dasgupta's translation actually makes him live in English.

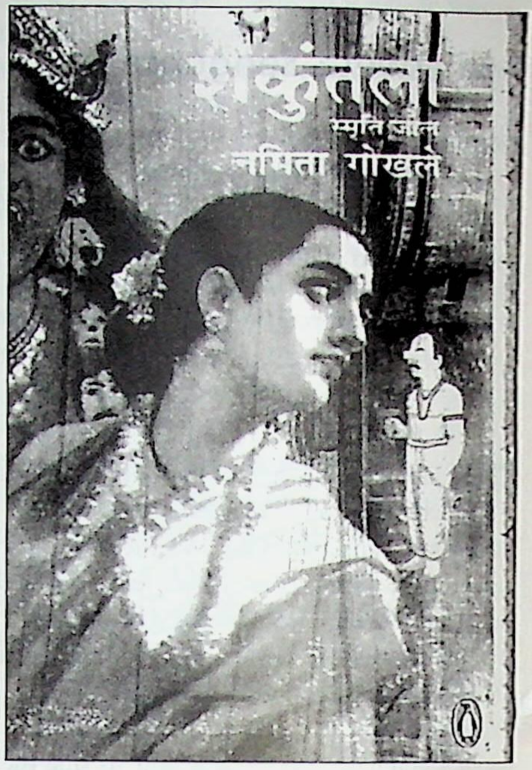
Let us hope that wonderful translations like these two texts would appear in the English language to demonstrate the variety and exuberance of the Indian regional language literatures so that the vitality and abundance of it is apparent. It is fortunate for the reader in India to be able to get these books in translation, because they portray a world that is thriving and changing with time, and not a frozen replica of some idea.■

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Recalling An Epic

B. Mangalam

SHAKUNTALA: THE PLAY OF MEMORY
By Namita Gokhale
Penguin, Delhi, 2005, pp.208, Rs.300.00



It is difficult for certain writers to outgrow the reputation associated with their first novel. They go back to their first tale in each of their subsequent tales and write newer versions of the same. Some of them do it in pursuit of a quest — spiritual or literary. Some others perhaps end up doing so as they do not wish to grow out of their earlier image. A reading of Namita Gokhale's *Shakuntala* raises a strong suspicion that the writer has Sanskritized Paro and named her Shakuntala. Despite Gokhale's deliberate turning away from her conversational, lively, everyday vocabulary and her rather contrived, self-conscious use of nostalgia-ridden, archaic English, liberally interspersed with Sanskrit words (that are quickly rephrased in English), her 'Shakuntala' is as predictable and clichéd as was her 'Paro' in many ways. Gokhale's *Play of Memory* is a vain attempt at reciting Kalidasa's Shakuntala and juxtaposing her to a modern-day namesake who is abandoned in love, or so that narrative claims. It is another matter that Gokhale's Shakuntala abandons her husband and later her Greek lover and is too slothful to stake her honour or claim justice.

From the start, Gokhale's *Shakuntala* is a misleading, masquerading and utterly pathetic attempt at recalling the Sanskrit epic. The writer's use of legends, history, philosophy, religion or feminist thought are either contrived or misinformed. A tale of a provincial woman's quest for adventure, travel, sexual fulfillment and bitterness at shackles of domesticity and denial of access to education carries within it an immense potential for social comment with an interplay of history, legend and contemporary life. But Gokhale thwarts her art by meandering into surreal dreams, long rhetorical verses and pedantic style, dotted with Sanskrit words and their literal equivalents in English. Examining unequal gender relations within the institution of marriage or historicizing women's desire for freedom from bondage are issues that hardly merit an exotic locale punctuated by erotic escapades. Especially so, when such escapades too are not allowed to break out of the novelist's new found penchant for Sanskrit. Hence, the lover 'empties himself into me, pours the ritual oblation upon yoni'.

The novel abounds in Lord Varuna and his thunderbolts (to describe a rain-lashed Kumaon), Indra's Vajra battling Agnidevata, signifying a forest fire extinguished by rain! A mahout carries 'ankush, a goad' to discipline 'mrighastin, the beast with a hand' (an elephant, you silly) and the passionate lovers try out every posture listed in 'Kama Shastra, the doctrine of desire'. Gokhale's novel reads veritably like a novel translated into English by a translator not in sync with the latest in translation theory or practice!

The writer tries hard enough Indianizing English in 2005 when Indians are swarming BPOs with their global English! Her narrative of a pregnant wife abandoning her husband and hitch-hiking with a 'Yavana' lover, riding through rough locales on horseback and revelling in lust on the mleccha quarters on the banks of Kashi is riddled with clichés, Greek legends, Hindu tales and monotonously recurring bouts of 'fornication'. What could be more romantic than frolicking with a Greek lover (with a name as winsome as Nearchus) on the banks of Benaras while aiming to break through barriers of family, domesticity, stifling marriage and provincial confinement? Wow! But it is a fantasy that fails to connect with readers who are firmly placed on slush and mud.

'What wonders the world contained! How much still remained to be seen', gushes Shakuntala. But she is in the hands of a sleep-walking navigator, her author, who puts her through a roller-coaster ride of sex, horse ride, palanquin ride, boat ride, elephant ride. Finally Shakuntala has a roadside encounter with a bull who tears through her womb and kills her unborn daughter, while the son she delivers is taken away by Buddhist monks! Gokhale's Shakuntala has no regrets: 'I had lived', she proclaims at the end. We too proclaim, "We have read through, thank God; it has come to an end."

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Between A Village And The Metropolis

Usha Hemmadi

A THREAD OF LIFE
By Anoop Verma
Srishti Publishers, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 329, Rs.195.00

Three people are enmeshed in a story with a varied background. The hero, Anirudh Shukla is just seven years old when he runs away with a Naga Sadhu who calls himself Jungali baba.The boy's mother has died suddenly, leaving him to the wiles of his cousins, Hari and Jhankana, older than Anirudh, yet not old enough to discount fairy-tale versions of a wicked stepmother in the offing. When his father does marry again, the child forgets the very great love his family has shown him, and lets himself be traumatized. It is somewhat incredible that he accompanies the trident-carrying ash-smeared sadhu on a journey through villages, towns, fearsome jungles and cremation grounds. Wherever they go, they rely on the locals to feed them or scrounge for food in the forests. Six years later, they reach Rishikesh. By now, Anirudh is satiated with a routine both idyllic and boring. Longing for a life as normal "as the one he had run away from". He realizes that "in the battle in his mind Jungali Baba was squarely beaten by every man on the street that was properly attired, lived in a proper house, ate proper food."

His discomfort is aggravated by the street children of Rishikesh who mock his nakedness. Despite not mentioning this to the sadhu, one day he discovers a set of clothes hanging in the hut. Even this pleasure does not last long. He desperately desires material comforts: "like living in a brick house . . . ,going to the movies, eating in restaurants were what his wildest dreams were made of". The ascetic naturally senses all this and offers to take him back to his home. But Anirudh's fear of a 'stepmother' has not been exorcised. By now, the sadhu has developed a very real love for the boy, and wishes his happiness. A few days later, a transporter comes seeking the sadhu's blessings. Jungali Baba tells him to give the boy a job in Bombay.

The largest section of the novel is devoted to Anirudh's life in Bombay where he rises from cleaner to mechanic to taxi-driver. In the slum where he lives, he meets and falls in love with Jyotsna, whom he marries. She persuades him to revisit his village. On the way he tells her about his childhood. This has a cathartic effect, for he no longer fears a 'wicked stepmother' and in fact is actually keen to be with his family again. Anirudh learns about the trauma of change— his grandparents are dead, his uncle and cousins have moved away, the beloved home is falling to pieces. His stepmother, kindly old soul, lives in one small part of the once great house, eking a living out of a few rice-fields. His visit to his old home helps Anirudh to acquire a hard perspective of life. He determines to work hard to provide for his wife and the expected child. No longer will he be content to be carried along on the winds of circumstance.

This is also where the hitherto slow narrative employed to a lazy building up of ambience suddenly takes on a faster pace, subjecting the reader to a roller coaster ride. The baby, Kamal, arrives, bringing much joy to his parents who want the very best for him. This makes Jyotsna decide to get back to her nursing job. However, Anirudh persuades her that the baby is too young to be left at home. At this point, fate intervenes to put this hitherto blissful existence to an end.On her way to the hospital to tender her resignation, Jyotsna is knocked down by a taxi and dies soon after. Anirudh is bereft, and cannot help feeling that her death is somehow connected to the one great wrong he has done—changing his deposition regarding his eye-witness account of a street accident, in which a spoilt rich brat rams his car into a cold-drinks booth, killing both the teenagers in charge. It is he who has taken down the number of the Mercedes, it is he who feels tremendous outrage at the accident. Yet it is also he who is enticed by the boy's father into accepting five lakhs to change his account to the police, who incidentally have also been bought.

Shattered by personal guilt and grief at Jyotsna's death, Anirudh regresses into a claustrophobic world. Soon he becomes obsessed with the idea of revenge, indeed is on his way to stab the errant criminal, when Bollywood-like coincidence catches up with him. He fails to see an old man crossing the road, till he is almost upon him. Terribly shaken, he offers to take the old man to hospital. It is at this moment that he realizes that the man is actually Jungali Baba, or in his latest avatar, Yogendra Nath Chaturvedi, Professor of Physics. Taken aback at this new role, Anirudh blurts out:"But you were such a dedicated devotee of God", only to receive a second shock, to hear the man's cynical answer that there is no God. There follows a long and unnecessary spiel on how religion is a mere tool to subjugate and rule people. Hence God had to be invented.

Chaturvedi is sympathetic to Anirudh's story, but tells him bluntly that Jyotsna's death has nothing to do with his wrong-doing. In fact he believes that it is she who has thrown the sadhu almost under Anirudh's cab, in an effort to stop him from adding to his crime with yet another.

As a first novel, Verma's book suffers many lapses, not all of them forgivable. The flow of narrative is disturbed by the number of details about Anirudh"s past and present, many of which, omitted would give the work a firmer, more realistic shape. While Anirudh and Jyotsna are credibly drawn, the rich and arrogant Rahi family and their smooth-talking secretary are straight out of Bollywood. Least plausible is the Jungali Baba in his latter-day role as Professor of Physics, atheist and cynic. While many people move from disbelief to belief (notably St.Augustine),the sadhu does so in reverse, with no really logical explanation. His volte-face mars a story, which like the parson's is only good in parts.

Most painful of all is the writer's surprising ignorance of grammar, particularly in the use/misuse of articles. No distinction has been made between "few" and "a few". Certain phrases too, are unfortunate, such as,"evening was on its last legs". Describing a village fair, Verma says:"Merry-go-rounds of different shapes and sizes all festooned with bright lights, were operating here and there"— trite language to say the least. However, if Verma does succeed in creating a credible village ambience as he does in the early part of the novel, surely he could hone his skills to become a better writer.■

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Time / Space Interspersed

Deepavali Debroy

SKIN DEEP
By Nergis Dalal
Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 301, Rs. 250.00

It is an unusual piece of work certainly. It answers, in its way, the question of what makes for a woman's empowerment. Do brains count for a woman? Or is it only looks, and more specifically, a fair skin? The book seems to suggest that brains do count, backed up by money.

This book made such compulsive reading that I found myself reading it in bed by torchlight when the power went off. For many years I had not identified so much with a character that was, after all, fictional. All those who are "plump and plain", branded as "the brains", and taught to seek comfort in the idea that beauty is only skin deep, will empathize with Naaz Jussawalla, the heroine of this autobiographical novel. The book is like several diaries put together with the years mixed up. It intersperses time and place and throws much information or observation into narration. Zoroastrian, Christian and Hindu perceptions are juxtaposed, Hyderabadi ways are depicted, as well as those of Delhi, Varanasi and Dehra Dun. The mixture is not orderly or sequential, but deft and clever.

Naaz Jussawala has a Parsi father and an English mother. She has a twin sister named Yasmin, who is so pretty that she renders Naaz almost "invisible" in her childhood and youth. Yasmin is also teasing and mischievous, and sensitive Naaz gets deeply wounded by her pranks. Her grandmother however understands Naaz and prepares her in some sense to be independent and able to handle money on her own. Yasmin, ill-advised by the mother, makes an unfortunate marriage which ends in widowhood and poverty. Grandmother dies, leaving most of her enormous wealth to Naaz, disappointing everybody else, including her own son. Thus emancipated, Naaz sets up in Delhi on her own. She meets Ramesh, a young architect from a Punjabi middle-class background, and falls in love enough to be willing to pay a price for him. As a condition for his parents' consent, she provides the huge dowry for his sister's marriage. Naaz does not go to live with her parents-in-law, but gets along with them well. The sister, a little retarded, however ends up as an instance of bride-burning.

Naaz feels well-settled and has twins of her own – boys, who inherit the delicate looks of their grandparents and thus resemble their aunt more than their mother. Ramesh, aided variously by Naaz, makes his mark in the world as an architect, although developing a heart condition in the process.

Yasmin makes a re-entry into Nazz's life. Within days, Naaz finds her husband lost to Yasmin. The time comes when he asks her for a divorce. But Naaz has had time to think about how to defend herself. She makes it clear to Ramesh that she will agree to a divorce but afterwards, she will not permit him to even see the sons. She explains that she can establish in court that it would be wrong for them to see Ramesh and Yasmin. She has a whole list of Yasmin's lovers to prove that she will be an undesirable influence upon her sons. She does it as a defence, but Ramesh has a heart-attack that same night, and dies.

Yasmin visits Naaz later, hoping for money that Ramesh might just have settled on her before dying. Naaz not only disappoints her in the matter of financial help, but also deprives her of the satisfaction of knowing that Ramesh had asked Naaz for a divorce so that he could marry Yasmin.

Naaz thus succeeds in preventing Yasmin from snatching away her husband, and shattering the world she had built up. Ramesh goes out of it, but his sons are there for her, and, of course, the comfort and security of her grandmother's legacy and her own education.

Is she a heroine or a villain, a self-confessed (almost) murderer, deliberately creating crisis conditions for a heart-patient? The book leaves us wondering.

It is an unusual piece of work certainly. It answers, in its way, the question of what makes for a woman's empowerment. Do brains count for a woman? Or is it only looks, and more specifically, a fair skin? The book seems to suggest that brains do count, backed up by money. The only snag here is that most of the money empowering Naaz is inherited, not earned. If her grandmother's legacy had not been there, she would not have been able to get Ramesh for her husband, and therefore, kids, home and the rest of her world that she defends against Yasmin. In fact, on second thought, Naaz does not get empowered at all. Husband and sons, home and hearth make up her world. She may refer to academic and business interests, but she does not find them fulfilling or even engrossing.

Nergis Dalal is a very well-known name. She has been writing for over fifty years, journalistic pieces, novels, short stories, a cookery book, as well as a book for children. Style, language, craftsmanship, and feeling, nothing is lacking in this book of hers. But there is a lack that makes it fall short of being truly great creative literature. It is the lack of objectivity, of seeing the points of view of others, as well as the protagonist's. Nergis Dalal represents Naaz honestly and very well. But she also sides with Naaz, and like Naaz, never sees anything from Yasmin's point of view. She feels no compunction for Yasmin, let alone, show any understanding of her.

What would have been truly interesting is to at least have a peep into Yasmin's character. Why did Yasmin, so confident in her beauty and the attention that it brought, at all feel like teasing Naaz, and snatching away what belonged to Naaz (toy bear or husband)? What complex did she develop vis-à-vis Naaz? "With Yasmin here I felt the old sense of insecurity …"(p 20). What insecurity did Yasmin feel with Naaz there? Is it that Yasmin suffered because she knew all long that beauty is only skin deep?

Naaz could never put herself in her twin's shoes. But Nergis could have. The novel would then have read less like a diary. ■

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An Autobiogaphical Account

Anoop Verma

AN ANGEL IN THE COCKPIT
By Dr. Vijaypat Singhania
Roli Books, Delhi, 2005, pp. 288, Rs. 395.00

Adventures beckon those with pockets deep, despite the fact that being an adventurer entails sacrifice of the very luxuries millionaires may be accustomed to. When Dennis Tito paid $20 million or so to the Russian space agency, he was tapping into a fast growing trend—spending big bucks to experience adventures that remain out of bounds for the vast majority. For the privilege of a week's stay in space Tito underwent arduous training, at the space station he lived in cramped conditions without gravity. But in lieu of all that his was a wonderful space experience.

If there is any Indian millionaire adventurer club, it is Vijaypat Singhania who dominates it. Not content with spending his time in devising ways to make even more money, Singhania has become a super achiever of sorts in his forays of adventure. It was far back in 1988 that he successfully broke Brain Milton's record by flying a microlight aircraft England-India in just 19 flying days. Then in 2005 he became the first person to fly a hot air balloon to the edge of space at the height of 70,000 feet.

The book under review, *An Angel in the Cockpit* is Singhania's autobiographical account of his record-breaking microlight aircraft flight of 1988. So what motivates Singhania to take up this risky attempt? At one place in the book he does try to delve into his own state of mind, *"what is this that draws a man to adventure....* Is it to be able to say: I have pitched my fragility against nature's might and I have won; I have conquered not just elements to create a new record for posterity but I have conquered my mind and in the conquest I have found... myself."

Isn't it every child's dream to fly into space or to circumnavigate the globe in a hot air balloon? Singhania's adventure could in a sense be a resurrection of his childhood dreams. So on August 18, 1988, he took off from Biggin Hill in England in a microlight weighing little over 150 kgs, with a cockpit so small that Singhania was forced to lose weight by 11 kgs so that he may fit in. But even with a toned down body it was a tight fit inside the cockpit, with hardly any space left for manoeuvre. The book gives a day-by-day breakup of his adventure that lasted for 22 days.

The first day's flight brings Singhania to France, from there the next stop is Italy and then Greece, day eleven sees him leaving Europe and flying into Egypt. The Egyptian experience does not go down well with Singhania and he minces no words in elucidating on it-- the corruption, the red tape and the general mismanagement that Cairo airport is mired with. He is only too relieved when Egypt is left behind and he flies into Jordan, where the hospitality is great and he faces no bureaucratic hassles at all. Next on Singhania's itinerary is Saudi Arabia. He quotes from an interesting conversation that he had with a powerful Saudi prince. The prince wanted Singhania to appreciate the notion that every basic necessity in his nation was subsidized.

Singhania counters the Saudi prince with a terse point of view. He writes, "I then explained to him that he could not expect to build a nation composed of people who were forever obliged to the state, and accustomed to living on charity. Surely, I said, it was moral character that the state was seeking to build? Would it not be better to help them stand on their own feet instead of continually propping them up?" That is something that the India's ruling elite needs to hear—that nations cannot be built on the shoulders of beggars.

Singhania's account of his trip through Pakistan comes replete with a sarcastic sense of humour. At the Pakistani airport he is asked to pay a whopping $1000 for 85 liters of aviation gas. Singhania writes about the experience, "at that point, I probably had a better chance of making the Guinness Book of World Records as the man who bought the most expensive fuel in the world, than as the man who arduously flew his way by microlight into its hallowed pages!" But the Pakistani adventure is not over with exorbitant fuel; it flows into many more pages filled with accounts of seedy hotels, cutthroat pathans, and the experience of using outdoors as toilets. Finally on day twenty-two Singhania makes a touchdown in India. Though it is primarily a tale of Singhania's adventure, the book also digresses into some other interesting facets like the history of the Singhania family, and in the epilogue there is an account of Singhania's experience in flying planes for different airline companies. And the angel in the cockpit! Who is she? Who else but Singhania's granddaughter Ananya, whose photograph he keeps in the cockpit as a token of good luck.■

Anoop Verma has reviewed for *The Book Review, Alive, The Sahara Time, Indian Literature and Media Spectrum.*

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Cultural Studies

Power in Print: Popular Publishing and the Politics of Language and Culture in a Colonial Society 1778-1905 by Anindita Ghosh challenges conventional understanding of the cultural experience of the period, reopens some fundamental debates on the social structure of literacy and the Bengali *bhadralok* intelligentsia.
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 348, Rs. 650.00

Drama

Theatres of Independence: Drama, Theory, and Urban Performance in India since 1947 by Aparna Bhargava Dharwadker combines theatre history with theoretical analyses and literary interpretation.
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 478, Rs. 695.00

Fiction

The Colour of Mehndi by Navsheen Pashazaidi is the story of a Pakistani-American woman's journey on the edge of sanity.
Frog Books, 2006, pp. 248, Rs. 300.00

Book of Rachel by Esther David, weaves a heartwarming tale of a woman's battle to live life on her own terms.
Penguin-Viking, Delhi, 2006, pp. 197, Rs. 295.00

Weight Loss by Upamanyu Chatterjee, his fourth novel is only tangentially about weight loss and though the hero dies tragically young, it is fundamentally comic.
Penguin-Viking, Delhi, 2006, pp. 420, Rs. 495.00

Film Studies

The Kapoors: The First Family of Indian Cinema by Madhu Jain is based on extensive personal interviews which makes the book resemble the films that the great showman Raj Kapoor made.
Penguin/Viking, 2005, pp. 372, Rs. 595.00

I, Durga Khote: An Autobiography, translated from the Marathi by Shanta Gokhale, is the account of the life and work of an actress who entered the world of Indian films when women from respectable families were still forbidden to do so.
Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2006, pp. 194, Rs. 295.00

Bollywood Uncensored: What You Don't See on Screen and Why by Derek Bose dwells on the various aspects of the social discourse and raises some disturbing questions on issues like the government playing moral police, inconsistency in interpreting the censorship guidelines, liberties film-makers take in glorifying sex and violence and feminist perspective on denegrating women on screen.
Rupa & o., New Delhi, 2005, pp. 220, Rs. 195.00

Yours Guru Dutt: Intimate Letters of a Great Indian Film-maker presented by Nasreen Munni Kabir has thirty-seven unpublished letters painting an intimate portrait of the passions and obsessions of a tormented cinema genius.
Roli Books, 2006, pp. 168, price not stated.

The Art of Cinema: An Insider's Journey Through Fifty Years of Film Industry by B.D. Ganga provides an insider's view of Indian and International cinema over the years.
Penguin/Viking, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 258, Rs. 495.00

Gender Studies

Loves' Rite: Same Sex Marriage in India and the West by Ruth Vanita shows how subtly and imaginatively Indian attitudes towards same-sex unions have evolved over the centuries.
Penguin/Viking, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 370, Rs. 295.00

Historical Studies

Captive Princess: Zebunissa Daughter of Emperor Aurangazeb by Annie Krieger Krynicki studies Islamic women and not only sheds light on the condition and culture of their lives—their constraints, pleasures, powers and activities within the women's palaces—but also provides other perspectives of Muslim (here Mughal) process of rule.
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 216, Rs. 450.00

Delhi: A Thousand Years of Building by Lucy Peck traces the architectural influences of each period of the city's past and brings to attention even the lesser known ruins found scattered throughout Delhi.
Roli Books, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 308, Rs. 500.00

We are Poor But So Many: The Story of Self-employed Women in India, by Ela R. Bhatt, explores basic concepts of labour by shining a spotlight on the informal sector and its pivotal role in the economy.
Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2006, pp. 234, Rs. 595.00

Partition Dialogues: Memories of a Lost Home by Alok Bhalla, explores many human concerns of Partition fiction including the desire to find ways of living with the memories of the experience.
Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2006, pp. 244, Rs. 395.00

Law

Role and Image of Law in India: The Tribal Experience by Vasudha Dagamwar, offers new research data from the field of legal ethnography in India and especially from the unpublished records of the East India Company. Bringing together insights from anthropology, history and law, it draws political conclusions that are deeply relevant in today's world.
Sage Publications, Delhi, 2006, pp. 414, Rs. 695.00

Literature

Terms of Seeing: New and Selected Poems by E.V. Ramakrishnan, evidence deep disquiet that is a pointer to the times we live in.
Konark Publishers, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 80, Rs. 200.00

In Their Own Words: British Women Writers and India 1740-1857, by Rosemary Raza, examines for the first time the whole body of women's published writing in India upto 1857.
Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2006, pp. 290, Rs. 595.00

Urban Studies

Opium City: The Making of Early Victorian Bombay explores the linkages between the opium enterprise of Western India and the creation of early Victorian Bombay.
Three Essays Collective, 2006, pp. 112, Rs. 350.00

Hyderabad : A Biography by Narendra Luther describes the origin and evolution of Hyderabad's unique composite culture, which has continued to attract people since its founding by its poet-builder.
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006, pp.423, Rs. 550.00

Pakistan of Nehru's obstinacy and lack of goodwill on Indo-Pakistan issues, what emerges from these letters is a Nehru who was searching earnestly and agonizingly for settlement and friendship and cooperation with Pakistan, without, however, yielding on India's basic interests and policies. He took the Kashmir issue to the United Nations primarily for avoiding a war with Pakistan. Later on on February 16, 1950 he wrote that while he was not afraid of war from a merely military point of view, "it may mean foreign intervention and in any event it means saying goodbye, for a long period, to any real progress of the country." His objection to a war with Pakistan was thus not on just idealistic but realistic and long-term reasons of national interests. Earlier replying to those extremists who clamoured for action against Pakistan, he wrote: "Those who talk about joining Pakistan with India would end by splitting up India even more or making it weaker."

During the Bengal crisis of 1950, which was resolved by the Nehru-Liaquat Ali Agreement, the dilemma faced by Nehru is revealed by the following passage in his letter dated April 1: "Wars come in this unhappy and distracted world and when they come, we have to accept the challenge … I have no doubt in my mind that war would be a tremendous catastrophe for all concerned and that we should try to avoid it to the best of our ability. Having said this, I have also to say that, in the circumstances of today, we have to be perfectly ready for it. We have, therefore, made certain fresh dispositions of our armed forces to meet any contingency that might arise." Nehru was relieved and happy when he signed the Agreement with Liaquat Ali Khan on April 8, 1950, after the two countries "hovered on the verge of a precipice" as he put it. Referring to criticisms of this Agreement (incidentally it was powerfully supported by Sardar Patel in Parliament) Nehru wrote: "But we learnt long ago in the school of Gandhi that there can be firmness with decency and even conflict with the hand of friendship never withdrawn." This one sentence sums up Nehru's philosophy of action. But in the same letter his mind soared to higher levels when he said: "But that is not enough, for we are struggling to capture something that is in the minds and hearts of our people as well as the people of Pakistan." This is a struggle for friendship in which we in India are still engaged in the face of a recalcitrant Pakistani leadership and interfering external powers.

It is interesting to follow Nehru's assessment of the role of foreign powers in Indo-Pakistan relations. On March 1, 1950, he wrote: "I am quite sure that the Kashmir matter, as well as other conflicts between us and Pakistan, would have been much nearer solution in a peaceful way if certain foreign powers had not continuously encouraged Pakistan in its wrong course." These two volumes contain several analyses, done clearly, and crisply as to why the western powers supported Pakistan on Kashmir and other Indo-Pakistan issues. He believed that India's independent policies made the powers consider India an uncertain quantity, while Pakistan was more pliable. Further, Pakistan was looked upon as a reliable anti-Soviet instrument in the context of West Asian politics. Having come to this conclusion they decided to support Pakistan, and to concede Kashmir to her was the best way of making Pakistan stronger. This strategic approach of the West, as perceived by Nehru, continues even today to bedevil Indo-Pakistan relations and impose unnecessary and intolerable burdens on both the neighbouring countries.

Problems of the governance of India had preoccupied Nehru's mind a great deal. The manner in which he struck a harmonious equation with the top civil service, relied upon them and elicited their loyalty and admiration was remarkable achievement for a political revolutionary turned head of the Government. In spite of this he was vigilant with regard to the subordination of the civil and military services to the political masters. Even in his first letter to the Chief Ministers dated October 15, 1947, he warned them of the prospects of "having a government in office which could not get its decrees executed by its own servants; the sort of thing that is happening so frequently in the South American Republics. I would ask you, therefore, to allow no laxity in the loyal execution of Government's policy by its servants, particularly in the matter of just and fair treatment of the minorities." While he gave this warning, he also exhorted them not to allow external political interference in civil servants carrying out their appointed duties and responsibilities.

For Nehru governing India was not just administering law and order but also development. In planning and developing the country through democratic methods he saw not only ruling in a deeper and more meaningful sense but as a unique experiment which could be an example to other newly independent nations. He tried to capture the imagination of his administrators as well as of the people through the big developmental projects that he was setting up. He observed that the stability of the country was based on the confidence and the relative well-being of the peasantry and the workers. He went further and probed into the psychological foundation of good government. In June 1949 he wrote: "In the ultimate analysis even economic conditions are less important than the belief of a people in themselves and the government apparatus of a country. If they have that faith in the future, they will put up with any distress for the present. Without that faith, even petty inconveniences become irritating and disruptive." It is this subtle understanding of the psychological springs of political and administrative power that marks out Nehru as a ruler of the minds of the people as distinct from an able administrator.

The last letter of the two volumes dated 18th May 1952, deals with the administration of the country. Nehru dwells upon the need for training in the practice of government, of the need for having a large number of trained people, and of giving opportunities to people having merit. But his central emphasis is on the human aspect of administration. "The governance of any country in the world today is no easy matter", he wrote, "the government of a great and varied country like India is perhaps as hard a task as any in the world today. Any person who is associated with this governance must approach this great task with humility as well as with a measure of faith … The governance of a country does not merely consist in issuing orders from some high office, but rather in reaching the minds and hearts of masses of people, of bringing about satisfactory human relations. Ultimately almost every problem can be resolved into one of human relations—the relationship of one individual with another, of an individual with a group and of one group with another group… We are apt to forget this living in the ivory towers of government office and dealing impersonally with files and papers, but behind those files and papers and the problems discussed in them, lie human beings." This humanistic approach to administration was an integral part of his philosophy of politics and life, unique in a man who had to deal with a nation of many, many millions, and yet a nation which can really be moved into action not by catering to the vast collective but to the individual human being. Nehru had a deep and sensitive understanding of this peculiar secret of ruling India.

I have touched only on a few of the isues that dominate this first two volumes of his letters. Here are other vital issues he deals with—constitution-making, elections, planning, innumerable aspects of domestic politics and economic and foreign policy issues like China, Korea, South East Asia, America, Britain, the Commonwealth, Africa, the Middle East and also culture, society, the status of women, education, etc. Every one of these issues is dealt with directly, clearly and succinctly without any attempt to conceal or cover up and without stylistic flourishes. The letters are a mine of information on the formative years of the Indian Republic and of Nehru as prime minister. They are invaluable reading material for administrators, historians and the public, mirroring the mind of Nehru and the problems that faced India. One looks forward to the publication of the remaining letters which cover even a more complex and difficult period of history.

A Reflective Scholar

Kumkum Roy

IN THE COMPANY OF GODS: ESSAYS IN MEMORY OF GUNTHER-DIETZ SONTHEIMER
Edited by Aditya Malik, Anne Feldhaus and Heidrun Bruckner
Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, Manohar, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 409, Rs 995.00

Gunther-Dietz Sontheimer passed away in 1992. His writings reveal an intensely reflective scholar, who provided us, amongst other things, with a definition of Hinduism that is remarkable for its apparent simplicity and inherent fluidity. His works were also informed by a concern with the marginal, especially pastoral peoples. Besides writing, he was a film-maker, documenting the lives of the peoples amongst whom he spent his most productive years.

The volume under consideration incorporates the proceedings of two commemorative conferences held in 1994, as well as some additional papers. The anthology is divided into four sections, titled folk religion, *bhakti*, history and law, and epilogues respectively. Inevitably, these are not watertight compartments, and ideas flow across these divisions, enriching the contents of each section.

A range of issues is explored in each section. Some of these engage with Sontheimer's core ideas and methodological insights in implicit ways. For instance, in the first part, David Shulman's perceptive reading of the shrine at Lepakshi, Andhra Pradesh eschews a historical reconstruction in favour of a thematic analysis. He examines the sacred space as well as the complex ways in which its divine occupants are engendered. A similar strategy is suggested, in a different context, by Aditya Malik, who explores the possibility of understanding oral epics within a context of intertextuality instead of within a framework of 'stages of development.' To some extent, Alf Hiltebeitel's analysis of Tulu and Tamil variants on martial epics involving brother/twins and a boar hunt also underlines the complexities of these narratives, which defy a neat plotting of diffusion from an epicentre to periphery.

A more explicit engagement with Sontheimer's concerns is evident in the exploration undertaken by Anne Feldhaus, who focuses on the multiple ways in which brahmans relate to folk traditions. These range from complete ignorance of such practices, to condemnation, to asserting claims to define the traditions. From a different perspective, Elisabeth Schombucher raises the question of the validity of the categories of 'great' and 'little' traditions, (or any other set of binaries that we might view as synonymous) in apprehending ritual praxis in a village. Her ethnographic accounts suggest that these binaries tend to get blurred when viewed from the perspective of the village. What is particularly interesting is her account of the processes whereby the 'great' deities are incorporated within the local pantheon. Equally fascinating is Alexander Henn's documentation of religiosity in Goa, where Hindu and Christian deities coexist in specific localities and retain their distinct identities even as they are invoked by both Hindu and Christian devotees on special occasions.

By contrast, the essays in the section on *bhakti* are somewhat staid. Irina Glushkova records the presence of the *karkasha* or 'peevish' woman in hagiographies of the Varkari tradition, tracing their locations in these narratives, generally as wives (but occasionally as mothers) who nag their husbands, attempting to draw them back into the nitty-gritty of mundane existence. These narratives, Glushkova suggests, present a contrast to the sastric norms of the *pativrata.* The Vasudev, a hereditary category of singers within the *bhakti* tradition, feature in Catharina Kiehnle's account. Hugh Van Skyhawk draws attention to representations of Eknath (including an early 20th century film) to probe into the possibilities of a universal Hindu ethic. And Claus Peter Zoller treads over well-worn ground in his examination of Kabir and other *sants.*

The title 'history and law' rests rather uneasily on a section that includes some of the most interesting essays in the anthology. Three of the four essays focus on historical processes, while the fourth essay addresses concerns of law more frontally. Romila Thapar explores the multifaceted symbolism of hero-stones in the light of Sontheimer's understanding of Hinduism. She argues that these could draw on traditions of sacrifice, the *yajna* which was central to some strands of the brahmanical tradition, as well as on heroic ideals, including those derived from folk traditions. More specifically, she draws attention to the implications of references to the sun and moon, symbols of eternity, invoked to suggest that the memories encapsulated in the hero stone would survive in perpetuity. At the same time, the other associations of solar and lunar symbolism are highlighted—the importance assigned to these within Tantric traditions on the one hand, and genealogies on the other, render representations of these celestial bodies on hero stones multivalent.

Sontheimer's framework for understanding Hinduism is opened up, from a somewhat different perspective by B.D. Chattopadhyaya, who reminds the reader that 'integration' is context-specific, and may involve relations of dominance and subordination, a possibility that he develops with respect to the incorporation of the goddess within the brahmanical tradition. Using epigraphic sources, he documents how the goddess surfaces in different regions in the early medieval period, with provisions for her worship being listed out carefully in a process of brahmanization. What is more, he traces the contexts of this new-found visibility in terms of the patronage provided by newly-emerging ruling lineages. In pointing to both continuities as well as ruptures, the author calls into question notions of a seamless, if somewhat amorphous Hinduism.

Hermann Kulke shifts the focus of discussion to another recurrent theme in Sontheimer's oeuvre, the relationship between the *vana* (literally forest) and the *ksetra* (settled land). Kulke recognizes the potential of these categories, and argues for the inclusion of the *tirtha-ksetra* or the site of pilgrimage within this framework, suggesting that it provides, in many ways, a point of intersection for the concerns of the two polar contrasts.

Sontheimer's interest in the *sastras* is reflected in N.K. Wagle's contribution, where he traces the process of codifying customary practice in early 19th century Maharashtra. He reverts to Marathi documents generated in response to colonial attempts to grapple with customary practices. The original exercise was framed with a view to plotting correspondences between the *sastras* on the one hand, and customary practices, on the other. In a painstaking and detailed examination of the responses generated to questionnaires circulated by the colonial authorities, Wagle points to the somewhat tenuous presence of the *sastras.* He also suggests that the process of articulation of norms may have coalesced with their institutionalization. One wishes he had pursued this idea more systematically.

In the last section, the contributors turn explicitly to Sontheimer himself. There are two distinct strands—essays that evaluate his intellectual contributions critically, and more personal tributes to an extraordinary scholar. Dieter Conrad, for instance, provides an assessment of the place of legal studies in Sontheimer's scheme of things. He argues that Sontheimer's interest in the *Dharmasastras* was part of his attempt to understand Indian society, rather than a disjointed strand in his

intellectual development. Conrad revisits Sontheimer's study on the juristic personality of Hindu deities to argue that, in his attempt to bring contemporary judicial practice in line with what he perceived to be the specific requirements of the Indian context, Sontheimer in fact drew on precepts from western jurisprudence. His evaluation of Sontheimer's understanding of the joint family is more complicated. He suggests that on the one hand, Sontheimer visualized the Hindu joint family as altruistic, and perhaps did not pay sufficient attention to its sharply gendered structure. On the other hand, he argues that Sontheimer's restrained acceptance of the institution contained within it the potential for querying and transforming it. This is debatable. On a different note, it is refreshing to find an essay in a commemoration volume that provides a critical evaluation of the subject, rather than an unqualified eulogy.

Equally fascinating, and perhaps of more general interest, is Heidrun Buckner's re-examination of Sontheimer's definition of Hinduism, which is often taken for granted in some of the other essays. She is troubled by the heterogeneity of the five elements that go into the making of this definition, as well as by the attempt to combine structural and historical features. This, she argues, paradoxically produces an ahistorical model, suggesting that it needs to be replaced by a more complicated set of questions and a central focus on concepts derived from folk traditions.

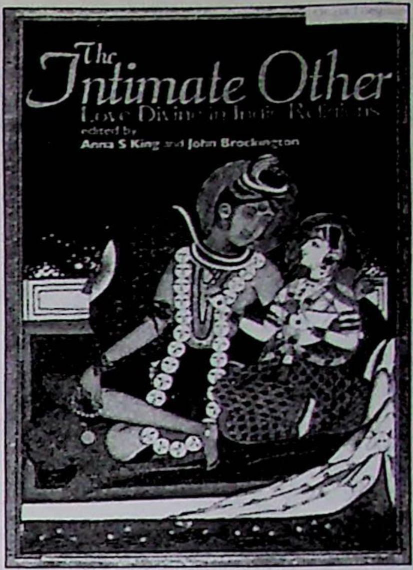
Other dimensions of Sontheimer's multi faceted personality find expression in the tributes by Cornelia Mallebrein, who records his passion for bronzes with unadulterated enthusiasm and by Hennig Stegmuller, his companion in film-making. The latter is poignant:

> What struck me most was your ability to listen and observe. Unlike many others, you were willing to take the time to examine individual elements carefully and get through to the heart of their multi-layered complexity….. Sometimes I could see that you were melancholy, sad, even resigned. You were something of a romantic and were in anguish when something idyllic, a state of affairs which in your eyes was happy, had been shattered. This sadness was most unmistakable when our conversations turned to the incredibly rapid changes which were taking place in the people and the landscapes of India which you loved so much.

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Understanding Bhakti

Kunal Chakrabarti



INTIMATE OTHER: LOVE DIVINE IN INDIC RELIGIONS
Edited by Anna S. King and John Brockington
Orient Longman, New Delhi, 2005, pp, 425, Rs.695.00

This collection of essays on the devotional element in Indic religions has an interesting history. It arises from an international conference organized by the Dharam Hinduja Institute of Indic Religions, University of Cambridge, which was widely attended by academics, interested lay participants and 'devotees'. We are told that the dialogic nature of the workshops enabled participants to engage across boundaries of religion, country and community, and gave devotees an opportunity to express their views and sentiments within an academic setting. The editors also declare that while making a selection of essays for publication, they had in mind a much wider readership than would be usual in academic contexts, even though all the contributors—except one—are academics in an institutional sense of the term. Thus, the essays do not really reflect the divergence in attitude—for, a devotee treats *bhakti* as a way of life, just as an academic problematizes it and treats it with the scholarly suspicion expected of him—they are lucid, sensitive to the devotee's concerns, and very accessible. The range of topics and the multidiciplinarity of approach also make the volume somewhat exceptional within the rapidly expanding field of research on *bhakti*.

In the opening essay John Brockington has set the tone of the volume by arguing that bhakti has to be understood within its historical and social contexts. He shows how the heroic tales of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* were transformed by an understanding of bhakti, how some of the Puranas further developed the emotional bhakti emphasis in their summaries of the epic stories, and how the vernacular adaptations of the epics became a potent medium for the transmission of the ideas of bhakti. He concludes that without the two Sanskrit epics, the Bhakti Movement could not exist in the form in which we know it. Julia Leslie's essay, one of the finest in the volume, explores how the pressures of bhakti have transformed the legend of the poet-saint Valmiki. By a process of text-historical analysis Leslie locates Valmiki in sacred texts and traces the key motifs of the popular Valmiki story—the ascetic in the anthill, the dacoit-turned-devotee, and the blasphemous *mara-mara-mantra*. She shows that only after the development of Rama Bhakti in north India was this motif attached to Valmiki, which illustrated perfectly the power of the name of God to turn the worst of sinners into the best of men. Leslie's discussion is marked by a nuanced awareness of the problematic relationship between sacred text and contemporary religious meaning. The third essay on the epics is by the *Ramayana*-scholar Paula Richman. She has analysed three modern British performances of the *Ramayana*, illuminating the different ways in which they deal with relations between the South Asian communities and the White communities in Britain—as a self-conscious political critique of racism and sexism, for instance. Although the conclusion of Richman reflects her continued interest in the diversity of narrative and exegesis in the *Ramayana* tradition, the role of bhakti in these performances is not explicit.

Winand Callewaert's lively essay on Kabir foregrounds the problems of textual criticism. He points out that poet-mystics, singer-composers and other interest groups have often sought to give their own poems and songs the authority and charisma of the glorious past and, in the process, have appropriated poets like Kabir for their own advantage. He then argues that, despite the difficulty, it is not impossible to earmark songs that might have been popular in the mid-sixteenth century and very probably belonged to the early core of Kabir's songs. Callewaert's discussion is informed by an essential Indian attitude to authorship that privileges grounding in an authoritative tradition more than the individuality of the author. Anna King's essay examines some of the popular stories, rituals and festivals of the Ganga showing how devotion to the Ganga encompasses the fluid and shifting perspectives of Hindu religious culture. Analysing the key motifs in the varying attitudes towards the Ganga from the sacred texts to the oral narratives and the new media, King finally argues that the growing global ecological and feminist movements are potentially new strands in the devotion to Ganga.

The next two essays address the tangled question of the place of bhakti in Jainism and Buddhism. Orthodox opinion denies the existence of bhakti in these two supposedly 'protest' religions. Peter Flügel, however, shows in his study of the Akram Vijnan Marg, a reformist Jaina sect, that the principal doctrinal feature of the Marg is the belief in the efficacy of the practice of *jnana bhakti*, the magical acquisition of salvific knowledge through devotional surrender to its source, and that at its heart is the devotion to Dada Bhagavan, the fully realized supreme self. Flügel observes that the sect split after the death of its founder, but for both the groups that claim his legacy the devotional worship of the Dada image is becoming increasingly popular. He debatably condudes that there is no essential Jainism but a plurality of doctrinal elements and that this sect can therefore be legitimately interpreted as a valid form of Jainism. Kate Crosby analyses the treatment of Buddha images in Theravada Buddhism proper, drawing upon a number of studies which emphasize the dichotomy between doctrine and emotional need of the devotee, between orthodoxy and traditional practice. Crosby argues that worshippers believe, and consecration rituals of new Buddha statues reinforces this belief, that the Buddha's power is present in his statues. She goes on to argue that it is wrong to assume that in Theravada Buddhism devotion is primarily for lay followers and meditation for the Sangha. On the contrary, devotion and meditation are combined and devotion is advocated specifically for those undertaking the rigorous path of meditation practice aimed at Buddhahood. It is evident from these two important contributions to the volume that it is difficult to get away from the devotional element in any religious practice, but especially in the context of image worship.

The next two essays are on Islam and Sikhism. Ron Geaves focuses on Sufism as a vibrant living tradition that has profoundly influenced the development of Islam in the Indian subcontinent and also in the ways in which Sufism has provided a bridge to certain forms of Hinduism, particularly the Sant traditions of northern India. In tracing the development of the Islamic devotional path in India, Geaves pays special attention to the early influence of Ibn al-Arabi's idea that love is Allah's innermost essence, and then to the integrationist approach to Islam and Hinduism of the Mughal emperor Akbar and prince Dara Shikoh, both of whom were influenced by Sufism. He finally explores the confluence between the medieval Sants and Sufis, analysing and comparing their ideas of God, the roles of the *sheikh* and the guru, and the use of the vernacular in poetry and preaching. Eleanor Nesbitt bases her chapter on ethnographic explorations of the ways in which Sikh children are nurtured in Sikh devotion in contemporary Britain. She offers a vivid picture of how children are brought up to revere 'photos' of Sikh gurus, contemporary living saints and the *Guru Granth*. She further notes that children use the term 'God' when referring to the living master, the scriptures and the historical gurus, and comments on the frequent untroubled slippage between God and Gods. Nesbitt's analysis of the convergence in this one English word 'God' of European theology on the one hand and Hindu-Indic darshan on the other illustrates the need for further research on language among diasporic communities.

The last two essays are on two apparently dissimilar but highly relevant themes in bhakti studies—devotional music and religious death. Jameela Siddiqi writes of the shared heritage of devotion in subcontinental traditions of poetry, language and music. She points out that north Indian classical music is a synthesis of Hindu and Muslim musical traditions and that Sufi *qawwali*, Sikh *shabad kirtan* and Hindu *bhajan* share poetic and musical idioms. Many Hindu and Sikh hymns are consistent with the Sufi message of unconditional surrender. In this context she discusses the 'crazy' love of the Bauls, wandering minstrels who can be either Hindu or Muslim, but whose music combines the spiritual elements of Sufism and Bhakti with the musical tradition of Bengal. The essay ends with an expression of her anxiety about the erosion of this syncretic tradition which has taken centuries to evolve. Graham Schweig explores contemporary writings on Hindu death and dying and the teachings of such sacred texts as the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Bhakti Sutra* and the *Bhagavata Purana* in search of the 'good death' and its implications within the Bhakti tradition. Scheweig argues that the Bhakti doctrine has historically moved away from human effort towards a reliance upon the grace of God. He concludes that the foundational principles of bhakti is pure unremitting love which is stronger than death. Thus, a devotee is not concerned with a good or bad death, or even with escaping the ties of worldly existence, as he remains absorbed in devotional love that overpowers death.

An excellent 'Introduction' traces the evolution of the bhakti ideas and movements within the Indic tradition, which helps to locate the essays within a larger historical perspective. The essays, despite the diversity in themes and approaches understandably do not address or only marginally touch upon some of the fundamental issues in the historiography on bhakti the element of social protest for instance, or the problematic relationship between knowledge, human agency and devotion. But then, the proceedings of a seminar is not supposed to be exhaustive. What we have makes it one of the finest collection of essays on bhakti in recent years.■

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Seductive Retelling

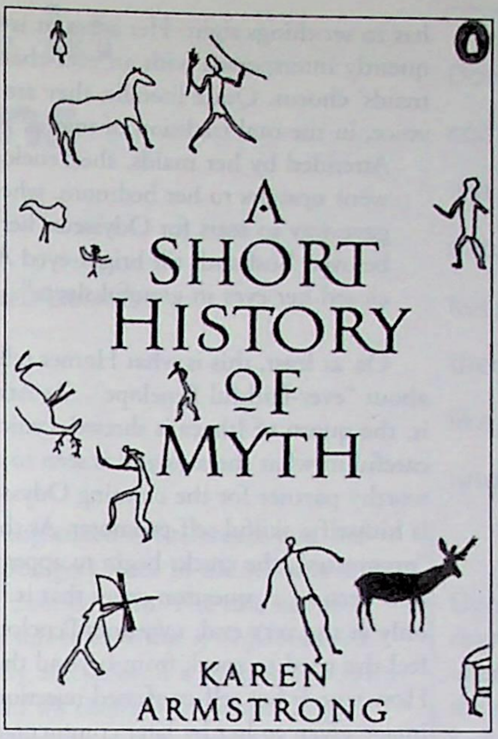
Rishi Srinivas Iyengar

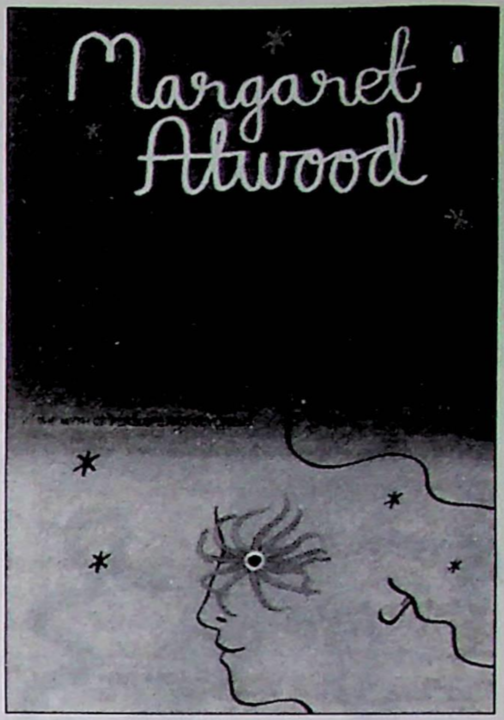
A SHORT HISTORY OF MYTH
By Karen Armstrong
THE PENELOPIAD
By Margaret Atwood
WEIGHT
By Jeanette Winterson
Penguin, 2005, pp. 135, 162 & 96, Rs. 225.00 each.

In a strange coincidence, I have recently read two books that present a grand narrative across a vast span of human history. There is a similarity in the approach of Christopher Booker in his *Seven Basic Plots*, and Karen Armstrong in her *A Short History of Myth*: prose that seduces with its lucidity, persuading one to accept their elision of particularities, and an engagement with concepts of archetypes. Both authors are prescriptive, demanding a re-engagement with archetypes in storytelling in one case, and, in the instance of Armstrong, with re-mythologizing the world. The prescription of *A Short History of Myth*, however, is at least ostensibly, taken further. It is the introduction to an ambitious series of novellas in which authors like Margaret Atwood, Chinua Achebe and A.S. Byatt seek to tell old and influential stories in their own ways.

The premise of the series is interesting and the attractive cover art is further inducement to read the books by opening their covers. Of the three volumes under review, the cover of Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* is the most intriguing: a profile of what must be Penelope, with an anemone for an eye, with the line of her hair extending to suspend the shades of her hanged maids in one direction, and connecting to the cursive title of the book in the other. That of Jeanette Winterson's *Weight* is simply irresponsible. As a recent commentator remarked on (DVD) spoilers:[1]

Beware the Spoilerfinks, my son!
The pix that wreck, the blurbs that pillage!
Beware the cover art and shun
The ruinous menu spillage!





Armstrong's *A Short History of Myth* is well-referenced but, given the tiny amount of space she had to work with, elides more than it elucidates. She presents a human engagement with a world beyond ours—the world of myth—that has grown more distant with time. Humanity, it seems, is like a couple that marries, passes through the initial stage of passion, experiences a change in their relationship with the entry of children and then, as life grows more complex, increasingly interact, not at an emotional and psychological level, but with destructive reason. Thus, the way in which we negotiated with myth changed with the introduction of agriculture and, as the complexities of urban life intervened, laid the ground for placing human concerns at centre-stage. Armstrong reads the *Epic of Gilgamesh* as a declaration of independence from the divine and the assertion of the superiority of profane civilization over sacred nature. The gods begin to grow remote.

Armstrong then introduces the concept of the Axial Age, hypothesized as a pivotal period between c. 800-200 BCE, in which a variety of powerful religious and philosophical systems emerged. In passing, I noticed that Gore Vidal is not among the authors who have signed on for this series. This is surprising, given that his novel *Creation* is probably the major work of fiction explicitly built around the Axial Age idea. The generalizations in this part of the *History* grow ever broader. Perhaps it is the lack of space in which to explain that makes them seem plausible, but not necessarily applicable.

This constraint is most obvious in the jarring transition from a world history to a western-centric "post-Axial" history. We are informed that:

> In spiritual and religious matters, we still rely on…the Axial…philosophers, and the status of myth remained basically the same until the sixteenth century CE. In the rest of the history, we shall concentrate on the West, not just because the next period of innovation began there, but also because Western people had already begun to find mythology problematic…we shall also concentrate on the Western religions…other traditions had a more ambivalent attitude to myth. In Hinduism, history is regarded as ephemeral and illusory, and therefore unworthy of spiritual consideration…[2]

Armstrong goes on to explain that "western people had begun to find mythology problematic" because, unlike other parts of the world, they approached *mythos* through the filter of *logos*: reason, located firmly in Greek thought. Not being a historian of religion, and having two other books to review, I will not pursue this issue further. But the viewpoints expressed here do not seem to be without their share of problems.

The perceived linkage between the *History*, and the works of fiction that follow, is made apparent by Armstrong herself: myth, among other things, is a work of art, like a novel. Although one is inextricably linked with the sacred, and the other is profane, both express important psychological insights that help us engage with the great mysteries[3] of life. Armstrong, in a publicity interview for the series, says:[4]

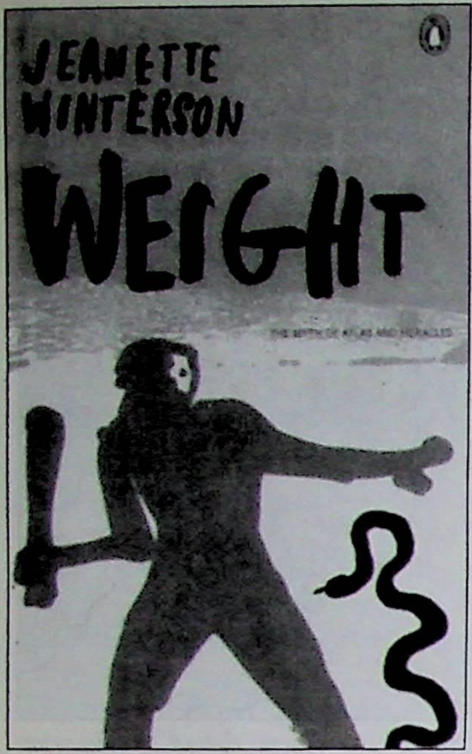
> That's why we turn to myths, to these stories of the inner life of mankind. If your child dies or you're witnessing the horrors of something like hurricane Katrina or the tsunami, of course you need to know what happened and why. But that isn't going to assuage the grief, turbulence and inner despair of that inner world. But myths—stories, novels, poems—can.

Atwood engages with one such terrible mystery in her subversively named *The Penelopiad*, which is a retelling of the myth of Odysseus's return to Ithaca. Curiously enough, even in this return to an ancient story, she continues to be associated with science fiction in spite of her ambivalent[5] and inconsistent[6] relationship with the genre. The prose translation of the Odyssey which she uses is by E.V. Rieu, who was a close friend of an important science fiction writer from the early twentieth century, Olaf Stapledon. This is apt, for, as Atwood herself says:

> (Science fiction)…can explore the relationship of man to the universe, *an exploration that often takes us in the direction of*



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religion and can meld easily with mythology —an exploration that can happen within the conventions of realism only through conversations and soliloquies....More than one commentator has mentioned that science fiction as a form is where theological narrative went after Paradise Lost, and this is undoubtedly true.[7]

Rieu's translation, which was first published in 1946 as part of the Penguin Classics series, was "in its intention, at any rate, a genuine translation, not a paraphrase or a retold tale".[8] We can gauge what he intends for a "genuine translation" when he concludes the preface by saying that "the most heinous crime that a translator can commit…is to interpose the veil of his own personality between his original and the reader".[9]

In *The Penelopiad*, Atwood tells the events of the Odyssey through the voice of Penelope. In particular, her concern is with the mass execution of twelve maids in Odysseus's household by his son, Telemachus. At the bloody climax of the *Odyssey*, Telemachus is ordered by his father to put certain maids, who were seen as willing collaborators of Penelope's suitors, to the sword. This is what happens:

> Then Telemachus spoke. "I swear I will not give a decent death", he said, "to women who have heaped dishonour on my head and on my mother's, and slept with members of this gang"…a noose was cast around each one's neck to dispatch them in the most miserable way. For a little while their feet kicked out, but not for very long.[10]

As Penelope wanders through the underworld, we learn about how she saw the events and people in the *Odyssey*. Upon hearing of the various subversions of the tale, she feels that she has to set things right. Her account is frequently interspersed with an ever-changing maids' chorus. Quite literally, they are given a voice, in the oral tradition of myths.

> Attended by her maids, she(Penelope) went upstairs to her bedroom, where she gave way to tears for Odysseus, her beloved husband, till bright-eyed Athene closed her eyes in grateful sleep.[11]

Or, at least, this is what Homer tells us about "ever-faithful Penelope". As Atwood has it, the queen of Ithaca is shrewd, cynical and careful in what she says and is seen to do—a worthy partner for the cunning Odysseus, who is himself a skilful self-promoter. As the story "progresses", the cracks begin to appear in this new version. A question arises that is resolved only at the very end: *why* does Penelope really feel the need to speak from beyond the grave? How true is her self-confessed rejection of the image given to her by later commentators? Why were the maids important at all? The maids' chorus acts as the voice of humanity. Throughout, they question the interpretations of their deaths, from those of Penelope, which undermines the "official" (Homeric) version, to the recasting of the story as purely symbolic, to the persuasive abstraction of the law, in a funny and tragic little fancy in which the maids videotape Odysseus on trial for his crimes against their humanity. They insist upon the recognition of their lives and the injustice of their twitching deaths, and most especially their identity, since a miserly bard gave them only a single face—Melantho, of the Pretty Cheeks. In sharp contrast to *Oryx and Crake*, this is a less dour Atwood. Although the "fierce, lacerating indignation" is still very much present in her writing, there are some hilarious choruses that seem to owe more than a little to Gilbert & Sullivan. In the end though, for all the insistence of the maids on the human truths behind the myth, *The Penelopiad* reads more like an analysis of how myths are constructed, accepted, challenged and reinterpreted. The book is a product of *logos*, not *mythos*—and it feels strangely empty.

The Penelopiad takes the form of an intimate personal memoir, but it is concerned with the unjust impositions of the external world and ends up seeming distant. *Weight*, by Jeanette Winterson, takes as its subject the world itself—borne by Atlas, who is relieved of his burden and tricked into assuming it again by Hercules. But it is really about the restrictions we place on ourselves. Unlike Atwood's retelling, there is nothing impersonal about *Weight*. As Winterson says in her introduction:

> Of course I wrote it directly out of my own situation. There is no other way.

As Atlas tells his story, we hear the original myth, and with it, the modern story of the world from the Big Bang to the development of life, all the way forward until our time when we have learnt how to attain escape velocity. In itself that is a dazzling feat. The boundaries she works within are tiny: one hundred pages that are a fraction of paperback size. She seeks to liberate Atlas from his weight: a world which he could have shattered at any time, but he chooses not to shrug. Heracles—lusty, brutal and unthinking but crafty and, above all, primal and primitive—uses the Titan to steal the apples of the Hesperides. Unlike Atlas, he wanders the earth raping and pillaging unburdened by the maze of restrictions imposed by thought. But he destroys himself as his stepmother Hera always expected. Unlike Atlas, he lays down the world and he does not live to be modern. Then, when the gods are dead and long after the world has "changed through a pale saviour on a dark cross", something happens that makes Atlas think, "*Why not just put it down*"? Freed of his own limits, he wanders across the field of stars.

Weight is in many ways more thoughtful and more complex in its themes and the extent to which those themes are explored. But it still seems raw and unfinished. Perhaps that is a function of the subject: modern humanity weighed down by the world it bears and is yet to escape from its self constructed boundaries.■

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Reference

[1] Emerson, Jim, "DVD Spoilers: Dirty Rotten Scandals", 16 Mar., 2006. http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20060316/SCANNERS/60316001

[2] Armstrong, Karen. *A Short History of Myth*, p. 91. Penguin India, 2006.

[3] A word with the same etymological root as myth.

[4] Robinson, David, "The truth about myths", 29 Oct., 2005, Scotsman.com, http://news.scotsman.com/topics.cfm?tid=873&id=2162192005

[5] She has insisted on describing her novels such as *A Handmaid's Tale* and *Oryx and Crake* as "speculative fiction. See, for example, Potts, Robert, "A light in the wilderness", *The Grauniad*, 26 April, 2003. http://books.guardian.co.uk/departments/generalfiction/story/0,6000,943485,00.html.

[6] Her comments in the foregoing article are somewhat inconsistent with what she says in "Aliens have taken the place of Angels" (*fn.* 6, below). More illuminating, perhaps, is her review in the *NYRB*: "The Queen of Quinkdom", *The New York Review of Books*, 26 September, 2002. http://www.nybooks.com/articles/15677

[7] Atwood, Margaret, "Aliens have taken the place of angels: Margaret Atwood on why we need science fiction", *The Grauniad*, June 17, 2005. http://books.guardian.co.uk/departments/sciencefiction/story/0,,1507975,00.html. Emphasis mine.

[8] Rieu, EV(trans.). *The Odyssey.* Penguin Books, 1975. My edition is the original by EV Rieu. Atwood uses the version revised by DCH Rieu.

[9] *Ibid.*

[10] *Ibid.* p. 340.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 325.

Common Patterns in Differing Traditions

Pradip Bhattacharya

THE WOMAN WHO PRETENDED TO BE WHO SHE WAS: MYTHS OF SELF-IMITATION
By Wendy Doniger
Oxford University Press, New York, 2005, pp.272, $32.00

Doniger's great contribution to comparative mythology studies has been the elaboration of the Mobius strip nature of the bedtrick, where themes keep unravelling and doubling back on themselves, or interlock on semblances like a Venn diagram whose intersecting rings have no central ring.

"And the way up is the way down, the way forward is the way back."—T.S. Eliot

This book, with an unusually long title, rounds off the investigation that Wendy Doniger, Mircea Eliade Distinguished Service Professor of the History of Religions at Chicago, launched in 1998 with *The Implied Spider: Politics and Theology in Myth* (Columbia University Press). The study sought to show how a web of shared meaning is woven by common patterns recurring in differing cultural traditions, leaping "from myth to myth as if they were stepping stones over the gulf that seems to separate cultures", bridging the religious and the political, the personal and the universal; and how, from the same text, different political meanings can be drawn depending upon the historical context. The next year, in *Splitting the Difference: Gender and Myth in Ancient Greece and India* (University of Chicago Press), she analysed myths of sexual doubles to reveal how myth-making can become a means of breaking barriers of gender and culture. The millennial year saw the publication of *The Bedtrick* (University of Chicago Press) examining the patterns civilization has created to lie about sexual relationships. Doniger's great contribution to comparative mythology studies has been the elaboration of the Mobius strip nature of the bedtrick, where themes keep unravelling and doubling back on themselves, or interlock on semblances like a Venn diagram whose intersecting rings have no central ring. To depict its pan-cultural spread, she surveyed not only Indo-European mythology, but Arabic, Inuit, Japanese, Chinese, African, South American, Polynesian, Indonesian and Native American tales, medieval romances, opera, Shakespearean and Jacobean drama as well—and even an unknown poem by Lincoln.

Finally, after a gap of four years, comes the last book in the quartet, completing her epic investigation into cross-cultural sameness centring around confusion of identity in erotic situations. Such incidents are like fireworks setting off sparks that touch remembering and forgetting, unplanned self-reference and self-imitation. Doniger's focus in the series is more the woman than the man. The title has an explanatory sub-title, *Myths of Self-imitation*. Appropriately, the jacket is a striking still from the film *Shall We Dance* with Ginger Rogers flanked by actresses wearing masks in her likeness. Doniger does not spare herself. The rear flap carries an ethereal photo of her in 1959— perhaps yet another instance of the mask the author wore to discover her own self. In the book she analyses myths about people having to wear masks to discover who they really are, for the mask ends up revealing the true self. Unlike the earlier books that dealt with fragmented and false identities, with differences of gender and of sex, here she deals with multiple identities and love, restricting herself to the Indo-European myths— from the *Mahabharata* to the *New York Times*— including the make-believe world of Hindi films and English movies.

The study investigates several themes: the mythology of self-impersonation; mistaking one's wife for one's wife (Udayana, Figaro); the double amnesia of Siegfried and Brunnhilde; the comedy of resurrection and remarriage (Sita, Shakespeare, movies); the tragedy of amnesia and remarriage (*Random Harvest* etc.); reincarnation (*Yoga Vashishtha Ramayana, Madhumati, Karz*); myth of face-lifts (Hollywood and Bollywood); mind-lifts (films); race and gender (women-as-women, women-as-men: Rosalind, Chudala of *Yoga Vashishtha*).

Doniger traces self-imitation to the cliché "Nature imitates art", as in the Werther effect she sees exemplified in Graham Greene's *Our Man in Havana* and Orson Welles' radio broadcast of *The War of the Worlds*. A famous instance she does not mention is the uproar that followed the "death" of Sherlock Holmes. The film *True Lies* is a fine take-off on the theme of life-imitates-art-which-imitates-life. The play-within-the-play is, of course, all about this and has been reused in recent films like *Shadow of the Vampire* in which a real vampire is hired to play the lead role, or the earlier *Miracle on 34th Street* where Santa Claus pretends to be an actor hired to play the part.

Doniger questions if we are conscious when we engage in self-parody, her point being that often we carelessly cross the boundary between the unaware self-indulgence of our mannerisms and the deliberate attempt to present in public the expected image of ourselves. Analysing Harsha's plays *Ratnavali* and *Priyadarshika*, and the operas Beaumarchais' *The Marriage of Figaro* and Corigliano's *The Ghosts of Versailles*, Doniger shows how they use the technique of triplication and the confusion it leads to about who is in control. For, even the active masqueraders are, at times, found unknowingly impersonating themselves. The theme of one self-imitating spouse consciously or unconsciously remarrying or re-bedding the other is seen in the medieval Tristan and Isolde, repeated in Evelyn Waugh's *A Handful of Dust*, Graham Greene's *The End of the Affair*, Martha Grimes' *The Five Bells and Bladebone* and the film *Out Cold*. As an instance of how life imitates art, Doniger cites Milton Berle marrying Joyce Matthews, divorcing her and remarrying her later because she reminded him of his first wife, i.e. herself!

One of the most fascinating exploration is the stories of rebirth from the *Yogavashishtha* (Jivata, the two Lilas) and the *Kalika Purana* (Chandrashekhara and Taravati). In each new birth we continue to pretend to be who we are, repeating the desires of our past lives. The theme was taken up in the films *The Reincarnation of Peter Proud* and *Chances Are*— both of which add the complication of incest— and in the Hindi films *Madhumati* and *Karz*. "Hollywood develops a strand", Doniger writes, "that is then woven back, like an imported ribbon, into the constantly re-twisted Bollywood braid. After the first twist, it's self-imitation all the way down." Such serious treatment of mainstream Hindi films is possibly unique in western scholarship.

The most complicated myth in the entire repertory Doniger analyses is that of Chudala-as-Kumbha-as-Madanika in the *Yogavashishtha Ramayana*. These are the alter egos Chudala adopts for enjoying her husband's company as a

male friend by day and as a lover and wife by night by getting him to remarry her. Her real self, therefore, is Kumbha-as-Madanika, combining Animus and Anima to reintegrate herself and, ultimately, let go of her double. By assuming male disguise, women discover a part of themselves that they were unaware of and thereby release their full potential.

Through all the disguises (of face-lift, mind-lift and reincarnation) it is love that endures, even when memory and appearance are destroyed. This matches the psychological insight that the self is constructed through the reflection seen in those we love and who love us. We move from one self to another, feeling vulnerable without a mask that we use to attract the person who, paradoxically, will love us as we are without our mask. This, Doniger says, is the double bind.

On the other hand, the myths of resurrection, remarriage and reincarnation—as also the face-lift films inspired by Dorian Gray—depict the impossibility of changing and the inevitability of self-imitation. Yet, the paradox is that, "only by trying in vain to change into someone else can we become who we are." Fatalism, therefore, ties into these myths as seen in Oedipus's futile attempts to escape from the prophesied event. Who but Doniger would have the inspired insight of linking this up with Alice's desperate attempts to find a way out of the Looking-glass House, only to land up every time at the same door, or with the Arabic tale Somerset Maugham uses in *Sheppey* and John O'Hara in *Appointment in Samarra*?

Doniger draws these multifarious strips together in concluding that the rings of our lives intersect with other lives, then break away to intersect in other stories where we play no role and posits that "in a life there is no one central self." Always there is a self beyond the one we experience at one time, as there is always a life behind and after the present life. The selves are nested like Russian dolls or Chinese boxes, but each layer, each mask, each self is real. The apt comparison is with an onion made up of whatever is peeled off, with no centre. The very idea of a central self is, thus, deconstructed, the ultimate mask being the body itself. In a Mobius strip tease, Duhshasana can never get to the naked Draupadi; unlimited layers cover her. As in Zeno's paradox Achilles can never catch the tortoise. The final question none of us ever articulates, but is always there, "Who is this I who will die?" And that leads to what Doniger calls, "the infinite regress of self-discovery."■

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Indian Aesthetics Revisited

Parul Dave Mukherji

TOWARDS ANANDA: RETHINKING INDIAN ART & AESTHETICS
By Shakti Maira
Penguin/Viking, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 289, Rs.395.00

The study of Indian aesthetics came to the forefront following the publication of K.C. Pandey's work around the mid 20th century but subsequently it suffered from neglect. Several sporadic attempts have been made to revive interest in the subject quite recently. *The Journal of Arts and Art Criticism* in the mid 1950s had devoted a special issue to Indian aesthetics and had contributed to facilitating a lively debate around Indian aesthetics in comparison with western aesthetics. Those were the heydays of the comparativist approach which seems to have resurfaced in a new guise and in the context of globalization. Just as Gayatri Spivak has recently gestured towards a new Comparative Literature while mourning the death of disciplinarity, perhaps it is time for a new Comparative Aesthetics to emerge that will be relevant to our times. So it was with great interest I turned to this book with a profound title and a promising subtitle. In today's age of multiculturalism, perhaps it is time to both rethink Indian art and aesthetics from a contemporary framework and question modes of comparison between eastern and the western aesthetics in resonance with contemporary global reality.

In the very introduction, Maira places himself squarely as a practising artist distancing himself from any scholarly discourse and use of heavy Sanskrit terminology. He looks upon his book as healing the divide between a misunderstood past and a misled present and he offers to act as a cultural interpreter between the two. This picture is further complicated by the presence of a third entity which is the contemporary West. As one moves ahead in the book, it is fairly evident that this is represented primarily by Conceptualism, one of the contemporary art forms, which the author sees as a symptom of moral debasement and alienation that continually provokes his tirade for its undue influence on modern Indian artists.

If one turns to this book with the hope of learning about a new framework of approaching Indian art and aesthetics from a contemporary location, one is disappointed. But if one follows the main title *Towards Ananda* as a personalized understanding of Indian philosophy and aesthetics from the point of view of a practising artist, the reader is less likely to feel cheated. Fitting in quite well with the genre of a travelogue, the narrative takes us through a personal journey as much via the ancient art monuments as the contemporary art institutions in India and abroad. Perhaps it is the presence of the subtitle *Rethinking Indian Art & Aesthetics* which must be compelling the author to invoke Indian theories of aesthetics and philosophy from time to time throughout the book more as rhetoric of authenticity than a serious engagement with these concepts. But what is worrying even on grounds of a personalized account of some ideas from the traditional sources which may well have inspired his present artistic practice is certain misinformed notions about Indian aesthetics. The only aesthetician that Maira refers to (even in bibliography) is Abhinavagupta to whom he attributes the *dhvani* theory which in fact was put together by his predecessor, Anandavardhana in the latter half of the 9th century AD. ! If one of the aims of the book is to revive the interest of the younger generation in the rich tradition of Indian aesthetics and indigenous frameworks for art, it is first of all a serious responsibility to transmit correct information and secondly, not to single out one aesthetician from the past and grant him a canonical status. Otherwise, the consequence of such generalization of Indian aesthetics will serve to a) flatten the complex and contesting points of view held by several of our aestheticians like Bhatta Lollata, Sri Sankuka, Bhatta Tauta, Bhatta Nayaka, to name only a few; b) reinstate the notion of individuality or an individual centred aesthetics, something that Maira has strong reservation about as carrier of western value.

On the whole, Maira's project of critiquing the current trend among young Indian artists of mindless aping of the western art trends is perfectly legitimate and important but the critical stance he adopts vis-á-vis the West does not extend to the traditional Indian past which emerges as a mystic, timeless entity where cultural and artistic activity seem to prevail outside any historical frame and contingencies of social formation. For example, much is made out of class inequality ruling the art market today where a work of art becomes a plaything in the hands of elites; the caste oppression which underlies the cultural production in the traditional Indian practices is glossed over and at times sublimated as pro-

found and sacred act of creativity. When he invokes the caste system, interestingly he gives it a contemporary twist the way he writes about " a new global caste system, where lower class Indians were seeking access to New York's high temples of art" (p.46) In the absence of this criticality towards the past, even his vehement disavowal of any sympathy with the Hindutva ideology loses its force (p.14).

Despite profusely citing from Amartya Sen's *The Argumentative Indian,* Maira still projects a construct of the past as a seamless and conflictless whole where every part shared an organic unity with other parts and the whole. The main objective of Amartya Sen's book was as much to work against the orientalist notion of Indian thought as monolithic and static as to demonstrate the lack of consensus amongst various schools of Indian philosophy in terms of epistemology, truth claims and reality and the prevalence of dissension within the traditional knowledge systems.

A point worth pondering is that the call for reaching out to the unexplored past, the source of ancient wisdom and pure aesthetics as a corrective to an excessive dependence on the West comes from someone who had spent two decades outside India. I would place this book in line with a similar book titled *The Advaita of Art* by Harsha Dehejia and what draws them together in a common league is the Non-Resident Indian perspective from which the past is viewed. One would imagine that broader exposure to cultures other than one's own would enable a less essentialist way of understanding cultural difference but it seems to be a predicament amongst scholars who have lived away from their homeland, to romanticize the pre-modern past as an exemplar of organic wholeness and hence authenticity. By doing this, one has to realize that in place of questioning the orientalist legacy, one in fact tends to reinforce it at a time when it has to be questioned in the light of our contemporary reality. Such is the fate of even Coomaraswamy's works which had tremendous political edge in the colonial cultural politics but if our use of his work is merely invocatory, it lays his works open to misuses and misrepresentations.

Another binary which runs through the book is between theory and practice which has two important consequences: a) the figure of an art historian emerges as an object of much ridicule; b) the espousal of a simplistic and misunderstood concept of postmodernism. It is because visual experience is held up as a privileged category which is a key to all problems of interpretation that the activity of an art historian and critic is seen as secondary at best and harmful on art practice at worst. I would imagine that for any consistent critique of Eurocentrism which the author seems to be aspiring towards, the framework offered by certain postmodern and poststructuralist theories can be adopted as an ally. However, the author treats postmodernism as a monolith to be lambasted for corrupting the purity of the domain of the aesthetics and allowing the political to enter and rob the sphere of art of any claims to beauty. If Derridean deconstruction which shook the premises of western thought is deemed as western, it reflects his warped understanding of new shifts in critical theory and blinds him to the productive uses that some of these theories can yield to in opening up traditional Indian aesthetic theories from contemporary perspective.

Perhaps the value of such a work lies in its being a personal account, however impressionistic, of how the past is viewed through the lens of a practising artist and what his compulsions are for articulating spiritual art in a contemporary setting; the ultimate aim of the journeys undertaken by the author, both imaginative and actual, being the convergence upon his art practice in the concluding chapter. His critique of the present pedagogic practices in India's art institutions makes a point. However, given his celebration of his own status as a self-taught artist, he is reluctant to address these problems within the constraints of the institutional space; in the absence of which, a vehement and well meaning call for an integrative approach in the teaching of art to bridge the gap between art practice and life turns out to be an empty gesture.

What seems most objectionable in Maira's understanding of traditional art practices is his lapses into neo-orientalism that he ostensibly intends to steer clear of. The orientalist double bind between the spiritual/sensual East and rational West is upheld to the point of being the common sense. Again, it is reiterated that the representation of the 'real' in art was a western or non-Indian domain: (Till the advent of the Mughals and the Europoeans, there was little interest in making art that imitated the outer shape of things, as the reality was understood to be about the inner world: psychological, emotional and spiritual.p.83.) This regurgitation of Coomaraswamy's transcendental rhetoric today when the same historical pressure to counter the colonial bias against Indian art no longer exist, can hardly open up the past in any new way.

Maira's self representation of himself as an artist hinges around the romantic model who exults in the natural and spontaneous stirring of the soul and keeps away from any artifice. Perhaps, this is why in his regular imaginative journeys through the ancient monuments, sculptures and paintings, he celebrates their plastic vitality but expresses deep discomfort with the ancient treatises on art practice as arid and convention bound.

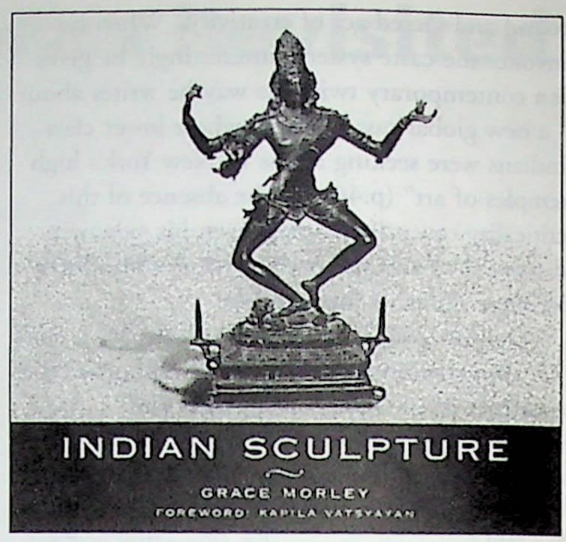
This misses out on a special feature of Indian aesthetics which seldom eschewed the linguistic/cultural grid through which the visible world was represented. Maira's binary between the notion of spontaneity and creativity versus the artifice of representation replicates more the logocentrism prevalent within classical western thought than that of the Indian knowledge systems. In other words, it is a utopia to seek a pure, non-Eurocentric space to speak about aesthetics per se but it is possible and vital to contest the Eurocentric logic and its universalist claims by gesturing towards its limits. And Indian aesthetics' potentiality to do so remains unexplored.■

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Masterpieces of Buddhist, Hindu and Jain Art

Tulsi Vatsal

INDIAN SCULPTURE
By Grace Morley. Foreword by Kapila Vatsyayan
Roli Books, New Delhi, 2005, pp.144, 62 illustrations, price not stated.



What could one expect an elderly non-Indian, a specialist in modern European and Mexican art to contribute to the creation of a museum of Indian ancient and medieval art? Not much, one would reasonably predict. But Grace Morley proved her critics wrong. Appointed the first director of the National Museum of Art in Delhi in 1960, despite her age (60 years) and despite her unfamiliarity with Indian art, Morley succeeded in not only giving the National Museum 'a character, a body and shape', but also in '(putting) India with its vast and valuable art treasures on the world map' in the space of just six years.

In her warm Foreword to *Indian Sculpture*, Kapila Vatsyayan describes how the American museologist, reputed for being an 'unapproachable, aloof and an exacting taskmaster' became 'a friend, guide and philosopher.' 'I became a pupil,' says Vatsayayan, ' Or may I say a disciple.' Each opportunity of working with her 'became an enriching, eye-opening experience.'

Praising Morley's enthusiasm for the heritage of Southeast Asia, her meticulous attention to detail and her tireless energy, Vatsayayan describes how 'years of arrears of accessions were cleared… cataloguing and documentation on scientific lines begun, conservation work launched and display galleries transformed beyond recognition in the course of two or three years'. International specialists were brought in, and an entire generation of young Indian museologists trained.

It is not clear exactly when Grace Morley wrote *Indian Sculpture*, nor why it was published only in 2005, some twenty years after her death. One can only assume that the book is intended as a tribute to the author. If this is indeed the case, *Indian Sculpture* is a disappointing and inadequate tribute to a woman whose very real and lasting contributions to Indian art won her the Padma Bhushan in 1982.

Vatsyayan's Foreword to *Indian Sculpture* is followed by a Preface which is undated. Although it uses the first person, one is left with the uncomfortable feeling that it has not been written entirely by Grace Morley herself. Considering the fact that Morley died long, long before the publication of the book, what is one to make of the following statement: 'Finally it is a pleasure to record here the appreciation of the publisher's patience in striving for the excellence desired by all concerned.'?

The works represented in the volume are masterpieces of Buddhist, Hindu and Jain art. It is emphasized that although 'the majority of the masterpieces here are works inspired by religion', they have been 'selected for quality' alone.'Those who are not of the faiths represented' are assured that 'it is the quality of the artist's realization … that is a sure guide to understanding and appreciation.' Did Morley actually write this, one wonders, or could this reflect the sentiment of an editor in today's politically over-sensitive times?

Indian Sculpture is intended as a kind of handbook for the general reader, to 'call attention to certain outstanding works representing different periods and localities and, theerfore, styles'.The Introduction provides a bird's eye survey of ancient and medieval art. An interesting section explains how differing religious sensibilities and beliefs among Buddhists, Hindus and Jains resulted in the creation of certain very specific types of religious imagery. The author also highlights the differences in inspiration and form that imbue western and Indian art, and urges the viewer (presumably the foreigner) to look at Indian art on its own terms, not on the basis of western preconceptions.

The Introduction could have benefitted with the use of sub-titles for the uninitiated. The text meanders back and forth; it is often repetitive and inconsistent. On page 20, for instance, we are told: ' In south India, the Pallava dynasty, dominant from about the fourth to the tenth centuries was generous in providing patronage to the sculptors….By the eighth century, the Pallava kings began to erect structural temples at Kanci, modern Kanchipuram, their capital.' Eleven pages on, after a description of wooden carving, Asokan capitals, the Bharut stupa, Amravati, Gandhara and Mathura art, we go back to the Pallavas, only to be told that the Pallavas, 'the dominant power in south India from the fourth to the *ninth* centuries, had, by the *seventh* century built imortant Hindu temples at Kanci (modern Kanchipuram), their capital…'

On page 20 we read that the Chola Dynasty's 'outstanding achievement' was their commissioning of processional religious images in copper unsurpassed in their expressiveness and quality…' But on page 32 we are informed that the Cholas 'hold a place of distinction because of the superb *bronzes* of Hindu deities… intended to be carried in processions.' And from Chola bronzes we move back in time to Aihole 'which may be taken to mark the …evolution of the structural temple', and then on to Hoysala temples, Jain sites in western India, Khajuraho and Kalinga.

In fact, the Introduction gives one the feeling that it has been cobbled together from bits and pieces of earlier essays and notes, resulting in an unstructured, often confusing narrative.

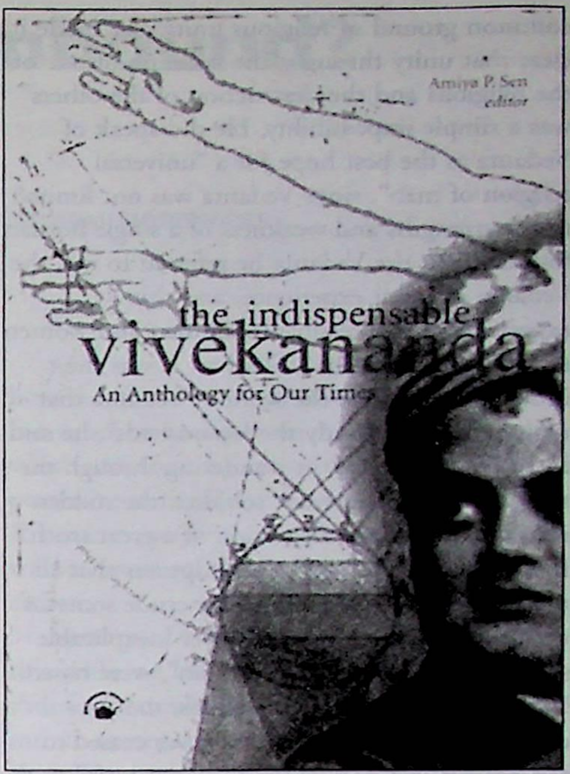
The plates are mainly of sculptures from the National Museum and a few other Indian museums. A handful are from archaeological sites. Both photography and printing are of a high standard. The plates are presented chronologially, and the captions are succinct. One wishes, however, that they were a bit more informative, and that individual sculptures were treated as links in a narrative of Indian art, with similarities and differences between successive periods emphasized. For example, it is not immediately apparent why the badly worn panel from Ellora, depicting Ravana's attempt to overthrow Mount Kailasha, or the image from Mathura of the Four Tirthankaras have been regarded as worthy of inclusion in the volume. A few sentences on the significance of the sculptures in terms of special sylistic features, aesthetic qualities or inconographical importance would have gone a long way in 'sharing admiration and enjoyment' for the selected images, which is the main purpose of the volume.■

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Finding the Unfamiliar in the Familiar

Peter Heehs

THE INDISPENSABLE VIVEKANANDA: AN ANTHOLOGY FOR OUR TIMES
Edited by Amiya P. Sen
Permanent Black, Delhi, 2006, pp. xi+242, Rs. 595.00



Growing up in Pennsylvania during the 1960s, my friends and I used to hang out at a drugstore (that is, a combined eating place, general store and pharmacy) in an outer suburb of Philadelphia. Bolted to the lunch-counter of this establishment was an ancient fortune-telling machine. On its front was the picture of a turbaned "Swami" who would share his knowledge of the future with anyone who inserted a small coin. A decade or so later, when I saw the well-known picture of Vivekananda clad in robes and turban, I realized that he was the unacknowledged model of the fortune-telling Swami of my youth. The rusting artefact on the drugstore lunch-counter testified to the nationwide celebrity enjoyed by Vivekananda seventy years before.

Today nobody in south-eastern Pennsylvania – apart from the tiny minority with an interest in Indian spirituality – knows a thing about the man who brought the message of Vedanta to the United States. In India it took a while for Vivekananda's name to become known – he wrote somewhat testily to brother disciples in 1894 that things might have gone better for him if people in Madras and Calcutta had held meetings "recognizing me as their representative and thanking the American people for receiving me with kindness" – but once established, his reputation has never ceased to grow. In 2000 he came out tops in the "great minds and spiritual lights" category in a *Times of India* poll to select the greatest Indians of the twentieth century – even though he died in 1902. His image is everywhere, quotations or half-quotations from his works appear on billboards and in the newspapers. But, as always is the case when a man becomes an icon, the richness and complexity of his life and works have been overshadowed or replaced by popular representations or misrepresentations. His words have not yet been reduced to the level of fortune-telling inanities, but they have been made use of by all sorts of people with all sorts of agendas, some of which are very much at odds with the Swami's hopes for a strong and spiritually united India.

An anthology of the works of a significant writer should serve two purposes. First it should familiarize a new or different readership with the works that made the writer famous. Second, it should defamiliarize these very same writings by throwing them up against less-known works that show different sides of the writer's achievement. Everyone should read Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (along with other over-anthologized works), but if they don't make an effort to read the prophetic writings, they'll never have an adequate idea of Blake as poet and prophet.

Amiya P. Sen's new anthology of Vivekananda's works succeeds in fulfilling both purposes. His selection from the Swami's *Collected Works* includes extracts from some of the best-known speeches and the four great works on yoga, but also some letters that give a glimpse of Vivekananda the man, as opposed to the polemicist and saint. Though happily not as reverent as a run-of-the-mill devotee, Sen clearly admires his subject and allows him to speak for himself, without trying, like other academic writers, to score points against the illustrious departed. On the other hand, Sen goes to no small lengths to situate the Swami in his social and intellectual milieu. As a specialist in nineteenth-century Bengal, author of *Hindu Revivalism in Bengal* (1993) and *Three Essays on Sri Ramakrishna and His Times* (2001), he is particularly well positioned to do this. His introductory essay is as good a presentation of Vivekananda in his times as I have seen.

The first part of Sen's anthology consists of extracts from talks in which Vivekananda dealt with issues that were of pressing interest at the end of the nineteenth century. What he had to say about national unity, caste, women and social reform is still quite relevant today. Sen reminds us that the Swami "cautioned against attaching any political significance to his work". Like others of his period, he believed that there was a beneficent side to British colonialism – though he was very well aware of the economic and political injustices of the Raj. But he insisted that if anyone was to blame for India's ills, it was the people of India themselves. "Why is it that we . . . have been ruled for the last one hundred years by any and every handful of foreigners who chose to walk over our prostate bodies?" he asked in 1897. "Because they had faith in themselves and we had not." Sen's treatment of this aspect of Vivekananda's thought is generally so well balanced that it comes as a surprise when he repeats (without reference) the Just So Story that Vivekananda "is believed to have met some young revolutionaries" in East Bengal in 1901 and advised them "to follow the passionate patriotism of the *Santans* in Bankim Chandra's *Anandamath*."

Vivekananda's nationalism, if one can call it that, was a call for physical, moral and intellectual strength. "We, as a nation, have lost our individuality and that is the cause of all mischief in India," he wrote in 1894. To remove this mischief – by which he meant ignorance and poverty – he proposed organizing a band of "disinterested Sannyasins, bent on doing good to others", who would "go from village to village, disseminating education and seeking in various ways to better the condition of all down to the Chandala". The education would in part be religious, but would also include the rudiments of science, geography, history and so forth. Religious training was necessary because "every improvement in India requires first of all an upheaval of religion". India's "sacred tradition" was the "common ground" of Indian nationality, "and upon that we shall have to build". This spiritual essentialism, useful at the time, has opened the door to a new sort of mischief, in which political Hinduism has tried to install itself, with Vivekananda's posthumous blessings, as the one true religio-cultural system in the country.

The historical (as opposed to the appropriated) Vivekananda would hardly have approved. Speaking in Chicago about "the

common ground of religious unity", he made it clear that unity through "the triumph of one of the religions and the destruction of the others" was a simple impossibility. He did speak of Vedanta as the best hope for a "universal religion of man", since Vedanta was not limited to the strengths and weakness of a single human founder. But the Vedanta he referred to was the Vedanta of inner experience, and this experience was accessible to all men and women regardless of religious affiliation. It was the inner spirit and not the word of Vedanta that mattered. "If we study the Upanishads", he said in 1897, "we notice, in wandering through the mazes of many irrelevant subjects, the sudden introduction of the discussion of a great truth." It was upon these equivocal scriptures that all the religions of India, "however crude some of them may appear to be, however inexplicable some of their purposes may seem", were based. When he spoke of these religions, the Swami clearly was of two minds. He never ceased to rail against India's hereditary "priest-craft" or to decry the abuses of the caste system. But he did attempt to salvage the system of four *varnas* by finding in it an exemplary system of social organization.

Vivekananda was interested in religion chiefly as a means for inner development. Sen gets it right when he notes that he insisted that "a people truly become sovereign not on the strength of their civic and political freedom but upon realizing their inner selves". "I care only for the Spirit", Vivekananda wrote in 1894. "When that is right everything will be righted by itself." The time-tested way of approaching the Spirit was through the disciplines of yoga. Vivekananda wrote books on the four main paths: Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Jnana Yoga and Raja Yoga. Each of these, he said, "is only a method leading indirectly to the realization of the Absolute." Sen closes his anthology with extracts from these important works.

I have only a couple of bones to pick with the editor of this first-rate work. First, he makes excessive use of elisions. It sometimes is necessary for an anthologist to cut passages from a very long piece, but has to be done in a way that preserves the integrity of the author's prose. Three or four cuts from a single paragraph is going much too far. Secondly, the index is inadequate. A list with just nine proper names, one of them Vivekananda's, is hardly sufficient for so varied a compilation. These quibbles aside, one may say without hesitation that *The Indispensable Vivekananda* provides an excellent introduction to the work of a familiar yet unfamiliar figure, who needs to be read with a fresh eye.■

Peter Heehs is the author of eight books, the most recent of which is *Nationalism, Religion and Beyond,* an anthology of writings of Sri Aurobindo on politics, society and culture. Heehs lives in Pondicherry.

Paradigm of 'Service'

Amiya P. Sen

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S LEGACY OF SERVICE. A STUDY OF THE RAMAKRISHNA MATH AND MISSION
By Gwilym Beckerlegge
Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2006, pp.206, Rs. 595.00

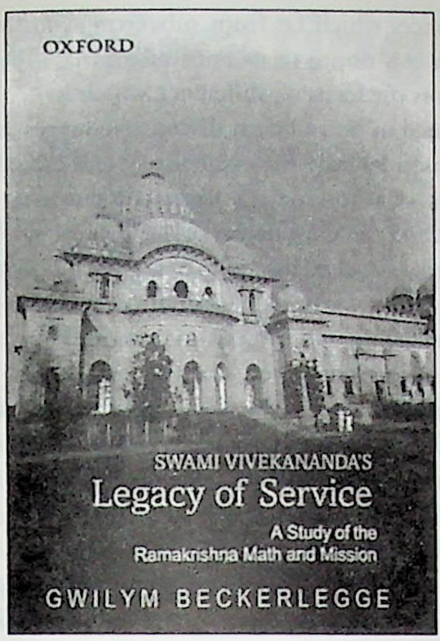
I have to say that Gwilym Beckerlegge continues to astonish me by the frequency with which he produces consistently good scholarly material for the study of the Ramakrishna movement. On the notion of 'seva' itself, (usually translated as social service) I recall having read no less than five research papers and a monograph in about as many years. There is, of course, some overlap between these works and the present one. Beckerlegge borrows and borrows heavily from his 2003 production, *The Ramakrishna Mission: The Making of a Modern Hindu Movement*. However, such borrowing also looks necessary for the sake of narrative continuity. Also, whereas the 2003 work was a collection of thematically diverse essays, albeit all connected with the Ramakrishna movement, the book under review focuses exclusively on the paradigm of 'service' as adopted and adapted by this movement.

At most places, Beckerlegge's treatment of the subject is direct and penetrative even though his major arguments are built up over a long succession of essays. Organizationally, the work is divided into three parts. The first of these generally deals with the concept of seva as it evolved within the Math and Mission. Parts II and III examine this theme in greater detail and in the specific contexts of the life and work of Sri Ramakrishna and his foremost disciple, Swami Vivekananda. The latter also includes a brief reference to the work of Swami Akhandananda, a direct disciple of Ramakrishna and one whose altruistic ideals closely tried to follow those of his more illustrious *gurubhai* (brother–disciple), Vivekananda. At several places in the book, the author engages himself with the important question pertaining to the ethical and intellectual influences upon the movement in so far as its socially activist goals were concerned. The conclusion that he arrives at, quite rightly in my opinion, is that this was indeed a complex and cumulative process that negotiated with several traditions, both alien and the indigenous.

On the whole, there is no escaping the fact that Vivekananda's utterances on work and ethical responsibility in this world often appear quite ambivalent. Thus, Beckerlegge is able to demonstrate how, a despondent Vivekananda negated the value of work itself as also this worldly engagement at a time he published his *Karma Yoga* (1896) which strongly put forth such ideals (p.133). On other occasions, the Swami seems to fall back on the view, strongly articulated by his guru, Sri Ramakrishna, that moral purity (*cittashuddhi)* was but a means to an end, not an end in itself. Such ambivalence, apparently, can also be found in Vivekananda's universalism. It is ironical that at a time when he began to more polemically contest western constructions of Hinduism, he also tried to project Vedantic non-dualism as not a culturally bound but universalistic and value-free category (p.253).

However, such limitations, Beckerlegge omits to say, have been endemic to the 'Universalist thesis' ever since the days of Rammohun Roy, also a practitioner of non-dualist Vedanta. What Beckerlegge does not also adequately expose is the Swami's gradually going back on some of his early and unique philanthropic plans, as for example, devising a secular vocation for Hindu *sanyasis*. In his early days as *parivrajak* (an itinerant monk), Vivekananda wrote quite enthusiastically about how a band of young, educated monks could tour the length and breadth of the country, teaching elementary science and other useful knowledge to the rural poor. For reasons not clear to us, the Swami does not appear to have pursued this idea and if my memory serves me right, even called it off in one of his communications with a fellow-monk.

The question to ask here is whether this followed from practical constraints of manpower and money or from a simmering opposition to the idea of world-renouncers turning to the 'profane' work of famine relief and nursing the sick. Is it also not possible that especially after he entered Europe and America, Vivekananda was increasingly consumed by the pre-existing middle-class rhetoric of India emerging as a the spiritual leader of the world, even if this was only to compensate for her obvious lack of modern, material progress? Many of his close followers in America, Marie Louise Burke included, did feel that the Swami's primary mission in the West was regeneration of a spiritually degenerate society and not, as it were, seeking the West's help in a developmental utilization of India's material resources. Here, it is also important to remember that in the matter of social and humanitarian work, Vivekananda was keen to avoid all possibilities of radical overturning of the status quo and class-war. This was indeed his advice to Akhananda, then in the princely state of Khetri. Finally, even though extremely forthright and courageous in his convictions, the Swami was also somewhat impatient and unduly wary of public criticism. This would explain his recurring mood-swings, of enthusiasm soon



dampened by despondency and this worldly commitments marred by thoughts on the 'transient' nature of this world. There could be, however, an entirely different explanation for Vivekananda's backtracking on social work or activism and one that he himself is known to suggest. This has reference to his brief visit to Kashmir in the summer of 1898, when in a very dramatically charged situation, he claimed to have heard the rumbling voice of the Mother, warning him of how human will and initiative paled before the Divine. Could it be that in his last years, a sense of 'failure' began to torment him especially when measured against his potential 'greatness' or did Vivekananda too begin to feel that a life of renunciation and a continuing social engagement with this world were, after all, not as compatible as he had come to think?

In this work, Beckerlegge also updates us on the important changes that the Ramakrishna Mission has undergone in recent times in matters of approach and organization. We learn for instance, of the trend towards 'recruitment' of volunteers and of the increasing reliance on state funds for social and charitable work p.255-56). Apparently, what distinguishes this study is not just the extensive use of textual sources but intensive field surveys at various institutions run by the Ramakrishna Mission. This, to me, looks to be a happy combination of the 'insider' perspective and that of the 'outsider' –categories that the author himself methodologically detects in studies related to the movement.

I am indeed happy to recommend this book to interested students and scholars. Beckerlegge's work helps us a great deal in understanding the ethical dimensions to modern Hinduism, especially in their social and historical setting. I am hoping that some day our author would have reason to also extend his interests to the study of pre-modern Hindus.■

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Prometheus Unbound?

Arvind N.

UNBECOMING MODERN: COLONIALISM, MODERNITY, COLONIAL MODERNITIES
Edited by Saurabh Dube and Ishita Banerjee-Dube
Social Science Press, Delhi, 2006, pp. 256, Rs. 675.00

There is a certain celebratory tone in writings about India today based on the perception that India is breaking through the shackles that restrain it and it will take its rightful place in the world. Increasingly we are told that we are on the path to prosperity and it is only a matter of time before we catch up with the West. The killing of tribals who protest against 'development' in Kalinganagar by the Indian police rarely registers on the consciousness of an middle class India too inebriated by its own prosperity. What this volume does is take seriously the reasons for the death of those who oppose the trajectory of development.

It does so by analysing the trope of modernity. The work of scholars such as Ashis Nandy and Gyan Prakash has called into question some of the holy cows of the project of modernity, be it the idea of progress, the myth of science or the power of reason. Scholars have exposed the power equations which are embedded in each of these constructs and how the belief in these ideas has had a significant impact on those who are not beholden to the same worldview. The various essays in this collection traverses the path of exposing what are the problems inherent in the project of modernity and then essays some sort of pointers to life outside the framework of modernity.

While this may be the continuation of a certain intellectual trajectory already made famous by the work of scholars such as Ashis Nandy (to whom the book is also dedicated), what is unique is the siting of this journey in both Latin America and South Asia. It is always instructive to get a sense of the debates concerning modernity in parts of the world which are not our own, and in that endeavour the book succeeds in piquing our curiosity as six of the contributions are translations from Spanish.

What emerges as a particularly central concern in the debates from Latin America is the treatment of the Indians both by the colonial regime and by the postcolonial order. As Zermeno notes, ' As a consequence of this transformation(colonial regime to postcolonial regime), the Indian people and communities were divested of their former status and made equals as citizens before the law. But at the same time, the Indians were branded as backward and identified as that part of the population least prepared to deal with the new rules of the market's political economy' (p.63).

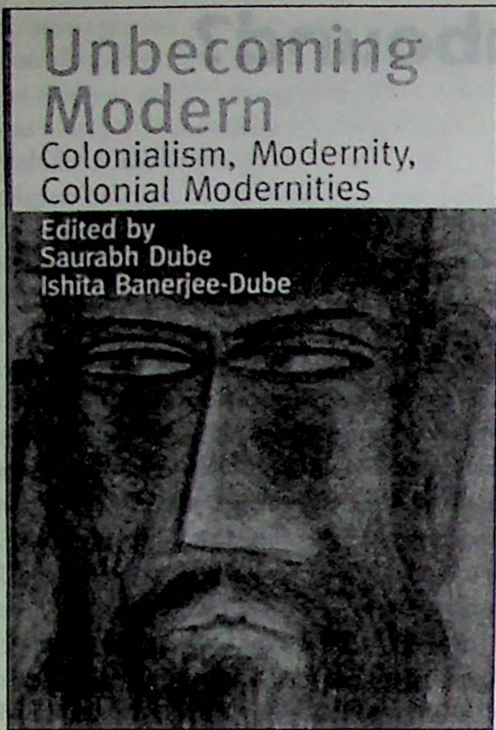
What emerges powerfully in this narrative is how the liberal ideology of equality before law can function to disenfranchise those lifeworlds which do not conform to the liberal idea of the possessive individual. This process of disenfranchisement was ironically seen as a part of the transmutation of the Indian from a savage to a citizen.

Systems of knowledge played a key role in this civilizing mission. What was required was the disappearance of the category of the Indian into the category of the citizen. 'That is why their incorporation in the civilizing process required the disappearance of their culture; at the same time, this denial implied a return to the indigenous past and the transformation of their arts into folklore. Scientific Anthropology, working in collaboration with state agencies, became one of the main tools for achieving the transmutation of the 'Indian' (p.66).

While the volume convincingly demonstrates a 'thoroughgoing critique of socio-economic processes of modernization as well as universalizing ideologies of modernity' (p.96), the question which arises is where do we go from here? By exposing the power laden binaries within which the world functions, i.e. (modern vs traditional, science vs superstition etc.), do we simultaneously end up valorizing the previously undervalued term? Does the process of locating the world within binary categories account for the complex location of the 'Indian' in the modern world which sits uneasily between tradition and modernity? Many of the essays in the book attempt to answer these questions.

As Saldana-Portillo's essay talking about the Zapatista movement attempts to communicate the complexity of taking forward a crtique of modernity by those embedded in modernity. He notes, 'Instead they are interested in presenting modernity with the gritty task of revaluation, of presenting modernity with another vision of itself by weaving the social justice of revolutionary radicalism, and the democratic promise of liberalism, together with an alternative knowledge of the workings of modernity. This is the vision of knowledge not of those excluded from modernity but of those who have suffered in full its consequences and hence seen its critical possibilities. Welcome to the era of Zapatismo' (p.52).

Another position which is put forward by Dussel is to note that there are perspectives which are possible from outside modernity.



While postmodernity would still encompass a critique from within modernity, he sees transmodernity as a phenomenon wherein critiques of modernity emerge from those regions which are outside the framework of modernity. Dussel interestingly reminds us that Euro-American dominance is little over 200 years old and that is not enough time to penetrate the 'ethico-mythical nucleus' of the 'intentional cultural millenary structures'(p.180) of the rest of the world. He sees the possibility of a response to modernity from these regions of the world.

Dussel may be veering dangerously towards a certain essentialism as well as romanticism of the non-western world. To what extent is the path taken by either India or China in any way a critique of modernity? Similarly are there really parts of the world outside modernity or transmodernity in Dussel's terms?

The essay by Dube is really an effort to critically evaluate what might be the nature of life under counter-modernity. The results according to Dube go in the direction of reproducing a conservative culture and should caution us against romanticizing any and every resistance to modernity. Dube in her essay, locates this disenchantment with modernity in the deep south of the USA and notes how the return to tradition seeks to 'conserve particularistic and counter modern forms of cultural value at the steep cost of stalling economic and political change' (p.112). Thus the critique of grand narratives and the return to the local ends up romanticizing sharp racial and class differences.

While the end of modernity and the postmodern turn is often seen as liberatory precisely because of the end of the hegemony of the grand narrative be it the idea of progress or the belief in science, what has not been accounted for is whether that means that the postmodern world has opened out more democratic spaces?

Answering this question with a slightly different nuance is Castro-Gomez's essay which notes that the way the present global capitalist economy maintains its hegemony is not by subsuming difference but rather by producing differences which far from subverting the system contribute to its consolidation.

Thus the focus on difference which is celebrated in postmodern discourse emerges as a key reason for why the capitalist system escapes critique. Castro-Gomez's argument is that to understand the dominance of the present system we need a social science which can learn how to 'name totality (with its persistent colonial face) without falling into the essentialism and universalism of metanarratives. The task of a critical theory of society is, then, to make visible the new mechanisms of the colonial production of differences in times of globalization' (p.234).

Thus this collection of essays through different entry points is really an attempt to call into question some of the received certainties of the present. What these essays do is to call into question the viewpoint which sees globalization as a benign process by exposing the violence inherent in the contemporary era of globalization. Where this volume succeeds is in also critically examining alternatives to the present dominant system.

One hopes that the process of questioning of the present trajectory of global capitalism and the question of alternatives to the present socio-political system is joined by more and more people. This book is a welcome contribution to this dialogue.■

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Celebrating Brand India

Surinder S. Jodhka

REALIZING BRAND INDIA: THE CHANGING FACE OF CONTEMPORARY INDIA
Edited by Sharif D. Rangnekar
Rupa & Co., New Delhi, 2005, pp. 188, Rs. 395.00

The reform processes initiated during the early years of 1990s brought about a major shift in India's approach to economic development. The old Nehruvian model of mixed economy gave way to a market driven economy. Despite changes in the political regimes, the reform process has, more or less, continued unabated over the last 15 years or so. Though these processes of liberalization and globalization have attracted a good number of serious criticisms, locally and internationally, they continue to generate a sense of hype and excitement among its supporters.

The volume put together by Sharif Rangnekar can be seen as a good representative of such writings. Though the editor recognizes the continued problems in certain areas of Indian society, the book is essentially a celebration of the "new India". It is not only in the sphere of economy that India is booming, the reforms have changed the face of India, its standing in the international arena, its representations, its self-image, and the manner in which middle class urban Indians look at themselves. In the global society today India is no longer seen as a land of snake charmers, elephants, maharajas and palaces. India is also not seen any longer as a country marked predominantly by corruption, poverty and starvation. In his introduction to the volume, the editor proudly claims, 'there is a new brand, or definition, for India'. India today stands for a knowledge economy, a growing manufacturing sector, a mature democracy and the land of vibrant music, art and films.

Apart from the editor there are as many as 15 journalists and other analysts who have written for the volume. However, the nature of their contributions is rather uneven. While some of the chapters provide us with detailed analysis of the specific subjects they deal with, some are short comments. But they cover a large range of issues and go much beyond the counting of growth rates of the Indian economy.

As would be expected of such writings, the book identifies information technology as the sector where this change became first visible. It was through the Indian software engineer that the "new India" began to be seen the world over. Though initially it was largely in the elite centers of software industry in countries like the United States where the skills of Indian professionals were recognized, information technology soon began to generate new opportunities within the country as well. The business process outsourcing sector (BPO) continues to grow in India and has become a cause of worry for many in the developed world.

However, India's success is not confined to the IT sector alone. Manufacturing and trade have also been flourishing. The reform process has transformed the face of Indian economy. Growth rates have more than doubled and India is now counted among the most rapidly growing countries in the world. India is becoming mainstream in the global economy.

The two important agents of these changes that the book particularly engages with are the growing numbers of Indians in the diaspora and the expanding urban middle class in India. Indian presence in leading countries of the western world has been quite visible for some time now. Their numbers are also quite significant in several other countries, such as Singapore and Malaysia. However, more recently, the Indian diaspora has begun to make a difference to the larger cultures of their host countries. Indian food, music and Bollywood are being accepted and appreciated the world over.

Locally, i.e. within the country, it has been the booming urban middle class that has been the main source of new aspirations and identities. According to Malvika Sanghvi, India is home to the world's largest urban middle-class, which equals in numbers to the total population of the United States at the last count. It is this landscape of more than 200 cities that attracts the attention of global business. Though the urban population has not grown very significantly in relative terms, in absolute terms it has been growing quite rapidly. More importantly it is the growth of the consuming middle class and the disposable income it has in its hands that really makes the difference. India's working population is also much younger in age, which makes the Indian economy even more promising.

After presenting several essays celebrating India's achievements over the last decade and a half, the book also has a chapter that provides us with a glimpse of those who are still 'waiting for the sun to shine'. In his chapter Paranjoy Guha Thakurta focuses on the problems of the farm sector, poverty and unemployment. While the percentage of those living below poverty line has gone down, their absolute numbers continue to be very large (223 million). Similarly, the agriculture sector that still employs more than half of all working Indians has either been stagnant or has been experiencing a negative growth. 'The real income earned by an average farmer has come down roughly by ten percent over the last seven years'. This obviously generates pressure on the rural population to move out of agriculture. While employment in the public sector has been coming down, the new growth has not generated much new employment. The result: a growing sense of despair amongst the large segments of rural populations.

Notwithstanding this recognition of the other side of the story, the overall tenor of the book remains celebratory. While it is important to understand the changing image of India in the world, we also need to constantly reflect critically on the processes of social and economic changes and how they are affecting different sections of the Indian population. The book provides us with enough evidence to suggest that there are very many complex problems that India today is confronted with. However, what it fails to do is to provide us with a critical perspective that goes beyond the 'feel good' factor.■

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Profiling India's Commercial Capital

Mariam Dossal

OPIUM CITY: THE MAKING OF EARLY VICTORIAN BOMBAY
By Amar Farooqui
Three Essays Collective, Gurgaon, 2006, pp. 111, Rs. 350.00 & Elsewhere $25.00

Amar Farooqi's contention that it was early nineteenth century Bombay's opium trade which was 'the defining feature' of its economic world and its business class, is a provocative statement that takes us straight into the heart of a controversy. Does Bombay really merit the title of 'Opium City'? Was it really opium, as opposed to cotton or 'white gold', that led to Bombay's growth as the leading port-town of western India? Shock value apart, is there enough evidence to corroborate the statement that 'Modern Bombay, in a sense, has its genesis in (the) poppy fields of Bihar', or that the '...destiny of Bombay as a great commercial and industrial centre was born of its becoming an accomplice in the drugging of countless Chinese with opium'? While we have to thank Farooqui for drawing our attention to the importance of opium, it does seem to be a case of bending the stick too far to the other side to straighten the record.

The three essays in this book entitled, 'Bombay : A Colonial Port in Search of Business'; 'Bombay and the Trade in Malwa Opium'; and 'Urban Development in Early Victorian Bombay', deal with (a) 'the problems of early colonial Bombay that were responsible for its relative obscurity till the end of the eighteenth century'; (b) '... the place of opium in the network of commercial and economic relationships of Bombay in the early nineteenth century'; (c) '...the prominent features of urban development in Bombay during the early Victorian era...' Of the three essays, the second occupies centre-stage and is the most closely researched . The other two play the role of supporting actors, which seek to expose 'the sordid underside of Bombay's colonial past.'

The first essay describes pre-nineteenth century Bombay as a trading settlement struggling to survive. While the problems of transport and communications, threats from Indian and European powers, inadequate supplies of essential commodities were real, and Bombay's rise to economic importance by no means inevitable, the eighteenth century did see Bombay emerge as a port-town of considerable importance, well-known for its dockyard and ship-building capabilities. The struggle for control of the India and China trade post-1780 created added opportunities for both European Agency Houses and Indian merchants based in Bombay. This, as the author rightly points out, had direct implications for urban planning and urban development in Bombay.

Farooqui recognizes that raw cotton played a 'significant role' in the Bombay-China trade, but does not see it as the primary commodity responsible for Bombay's emergence as a leading commercial centre. That place is clearly accorded to opium. Table (1) records revenues obtained from cotton and opium imports, as well as from exports of tea, for the years 1824 to 1833 and reveals the sharp increase in opium receipts. However the volatile nature of the opium trade and the grey area in which it operated, had long seen opium merchants hedge their bets in more than one commodity . Thus it was often the same merchants who were engaged in the cotton and opium trades, as well as other commodities that were traded at Bombay. To link profits from opium alone to the infrastructural development plans for Bombay, be it water supply, drainage, transport or railways, docks and land reclamation seems a simplified equation.

Some of the phrases used in the first essay are intriguing. For instance when Bombay harbour is described as extending over an area of about 194 sq. kms and is termed 'shallowed deep water', it would be useful to know – was it shallow or was it deep? We were also told that Bombay relied on 'the residual commerce of the Portuguese for providing its inhabitants with articles of subsistence...'. What exactly qualified as 'residual commerce'.? But it is the reference to Maratha chiefs, such as the Gaikwads as 'warlords' that is problematic.

The second essay in the collection is the most detailed, well-researched and interesting. It is here that we get valuable information on merchants who actually engaged in the opium trade at Bombay, Daman and Goa.. While Asiya Siddiqi's research has illuminated the trading world of Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy, his business associates such as Jardine Matheson and Roger de Faria, and trading networks in opium which developed between Bombay, Malwa and Canton, Farooqui examines the close links of Roger de Faria's firm with others in Daman and Goa, such as that of V. Nariana Camotim (Kamat).

Roger de Faria's firm in Bombay included Luis Francisco da Silva, Francisco Antonio de Carvalho, and Jose Maria Pinto as junior partners. Their business operations extended to countries such as Brazil, Mozambique and Portugal. For all of them, the trade in opium constituted their most lucrative business ventures. Other Indo-Portuguese merchants also active in the opium trade were Jose Francisco Pereira and Major Antonio Pereira, their associate in Daman, Dayaram Dulobha, and leading Bombay traders, such as Miguel de Lima A. Souza. It is the Daman connection with both Goa and Bombay that greatly adds to our understanding of the trading arrangements which developed both at the level of procurement and distribution of Malwa opium.

Apart from the Indo-Portuguese merchants, Parsis, Marwaris, Gujarati Baniyas and Konkani Muslims were also engaged in the opium trade with Parsis dominating it. Of the 120 firms and merchants in the group of indigenous merchants trading in opium, 49 were Parsis, the big players being Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy, Motichund Amichund, Khemchund Amichund, Hormasji Dorabji, Nagardass Hirji Mody, Madowdass Ransordass, Mohammad Ali Rogay and Roger de Faria. Others who functioned as traders, brokers, financiers and shipowners invested in opium but it was not their primary area of investment. Among them were prominent merchants such as Framji Cowasji Banaji, Pestonji Bomanji Wadia, Hormasji Bomanji Wadia, Juggonath Sunkersett, Dhakji Dadaji and Viccaji Merji. Farooqui's work is valuable for he brings to our attention merchants until now lost to history, men such as Hormasji Dorabji whose business declined following severe losses in 1832.

Useful information is provided in Table 2 which lists the ships owned by prominent opium dealers of Bombay in the early nineteenth century and their tonnage. The pass system introduced by the British in 1830 merits attention for it had a significant impact on the opium trade of western India. Earlier restrictions imposed on Malwa opium brought to Bombay for export were withdrawn and replaced by an opium duty. The essay gives us a clear idea of both the significance and the evolution of the trade in this important commodity.

It is in the third essay that the author explores the ' significant implications (of opium) for the development of Bombay'. But since the same merchants held diversified portfolios in cotton, opium and other commodities, the focus on one and the neglect of the others does seem surprising.

This essay deals with the making of early Victorian Bombay. While acknowledging that Bombay was an important colonial port-city the author emphasizes 'there is no such thing as colonial urban development in the abstract. Various urban centers were products of specific historical conjunctures.... urban centers of colonial India reflected variations in the level of

capitalist development in different parts of the country. Spatial organization therein was indicative of the relative strength or weakness of indigenous groups and their capacity to intervene in the control of urban space. The urban development of Bombay has to be seen in this context.'

It is not so much the spatial dualism of the European and Indian Quarters as the fact that Bombay developed as a leading capitalist city 'with class differentiation determining its spatial pattern' that is of significance. Central to its development and its most crucial components was the emergence of private property and a market inland. So when did feudal tenures and customary rights in Bombay get replaced by capitalist forms of land control? Here is where Farooqui inadvertently enters hidden quick-sands. Citing Dulcinea Correa Rodrigues's research on the subject, he accepts the view that private property existed in the southern part of the island, in Fort or European Quarter, from as early as 1707-8. The next fifty years, the argument goes, saw the acquisition of private lands by the state. After the 1750s there was a reversal again to private ownership with Indians emerging as owners of substantial properties by the early nineteenth century. Recent research shows that this was not the case. Bombay's complex feudal tenures continued to exist until well into the early years of the nineteenth century and the legal recognition of private property in land only occurred with the passing of Act VI of 1849.

In sum, this is a well-researched and provocative book, a set of three essays with a dramatic title addressing mega issues. Its tilt may be too far in one direction, its time frame too compressed. But it does compel the reader to rethink the history of this important city and enhances our understanding of it.■

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Multi-Layered Process of Development

Nasir Tyabji

STATE-DIRECTED DEVELOPMENT: POLITICAL POWER AND INDUSTRIALIZATION IN THE GLOBAL PERIPHERY
By Atul Kohli
Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005, pp.xii+466, Rs. 425.00

This book is to be welcomed for a number of reasons. Firstly, it brings politics back into the discussion of development issues; secondly it examines industrialization as a process that transforms society (rather than viewing it as merely a numerical growth in industrial output); thirdly, by analysing the experiences of Nigeria, India, Brazil and South Korea it addresses the problems of countries with undistinguished records, in addition to that of an East Asian Tiger. Finally, it moves away from the tiresome (if not misleading) approach of treating the growth of the information technology industry in India as an indication of the coming fulfillment of the industrialization process itself. Kohli also differentiates himself from neoliberal analysts of industrialization by bringing the historical experiences of colonialism into his discussion of the formation of the state in each of the countries he examines. However, his dissociation from neoliberal analysis seems to be based on his disciplinary identity as a political scientist, rather than any profound philosophical disagreement with neo liberal analysis. In his discussion of post 1991 developments in India, for instance, he relies entirely on the ideologically grounded accounts of neoliberal economists.

The book consists of introductory and concluding chapters, introducing the methodological approach adopted and the general, if not theoretical, implications of the analysis of the empirical material in the country case studies. These two chapters frame the main body of the work, two chapters each on the four countries considered. One of these chapters deals with the colonial period (or the pre-World War Two era in the case of Brazil), and the other with post-independence developments. Particularly interesting, precisely because it is generally ignored, is the account of the impact of Japanese colonialism on Korea. Unlike the well known attitude of the British to Indian development and their less well known to us (and considerably more criminal, if this is possible) record in Nigeria, the Japanese had a conception of an (atrocity and contempt ridden) objective of developing both the agrarian and the industrial sectors of the Korean economy. For this, they built on the pre-colonial tradition of state developed educational initiatives to create a state structure that led to considerable change in Korean society and the framework for an industrial economy.

It is to Kohli's credit that the record of the ferocity of the authoritarian measures required to bring about the dramatic changes in Korean society, both in the colonial and post-war periods, does seem to trouble him. However, this concern sits rather uneasily in the book, which is otherwise framed within the unhelpful, if not meaningless, labels of the cohesive-capitalist (Korea and Brazil), fragmented multi-class (India), and neo- patrimonial (Nigeria) states. To these are added, as occasion demands, the cohesive-lower class state (China) or a cohesive multi-class state, towards which India should aspire (p.277). In the end the reader is left with no greater analytical clarity than would be provided by a simple discussion of individual country case studies. Perhaps the exigencies of the North American proclivity for "theory" are the cause of this disease. A further consequence of this approach is that Kohli is led, finally, to award marks to different "states" for their performance in industrializing the societies they preside over. Expectedly, Korea wins the contest, Brazil and India share second place and Nigeria comes out a decisive failure. He recognizes, somewhere, that development (even industrial development more narrowly conceived) is a complex and multilayered process but his drive for conceptual or label based categorization drives him inexorably towards a ranking system.

The other feature of the book that creates a surreal quality is that of the agency that Kohli attributes to the state. Here again, his empirical accounts show that he is aware of real, live social classes (as does his classification of states themselves as "cohesive capitalist" or "cohesive-lower class") but the play of class forces, the ways in which some of these classes may resist or applaud the growth of the industrial society, is occluded by the short circuiting categorization of measuring the effectiveness of states as merely actors in the economic realm (p.408). Early in the book, he states (p.6) that one of its themes is the proposition that in those countries that industrialized rapidly, state intervention increased the private profits of investors. This objective was quite distinct to any intention to promote "openness" or "competitiveness". Though this is an important point to recognize, Kohli's approach to his empirical material in practice ignores the context of state

operation. It presumes that the society is already entirely geared to the appropriation of surplus in the form of profit. In cases such as that of India, where surplus appropriation in the rural areas takes the predominant form of rent incomes, increasing the opportunities for profits will not lead far. Indeed, that has been precisely the case where agrarian landlords have generally refused to take to capitalist methods of surplus appropriation.

Kohli recognizes that the transition to independence in India implied the final transfer of loyalties of these agrarian landlords from the colonial government to the Congress. However, he does not relate this social phenomenon to the trajectory of industrial transformation in India. The change from the period of Nehruvian import substitution based industrialization, to the 15 year period of wavering impulses towards greater reliance on the market on the one hand, and greater state intervention on the other during the Indira Gandhi period are viewed merely as a transition to populism; rather they should be seen as attempts to respond to the market limitations imposed by the agrarian crisis created by land concentration. Similarly, the neo liberal tendencies initiated by the 1980 budget and decisively cast by the 1991 budget are viewed in superficial terms as signifying "...India's fragmented multi-class state ... (becoming)...not so much more cohesive as markedly less multiclass" (p.278). The distinction sought to be made between cohesiveness and "multiclassness" is hardly an aid to clarity of exposition! The point being made here is that while it is generally accepted that the general set of policies varied in these three periods of post-independence Indian history, it is schematic to view them as modifications in something characterized as a fractured multiclass state. The question is again of the incremental insight, if any, gained by the use of this label.

Even if the categorization is unhelpful, Kohli's comparative method is useful for an understanding of what constitutes the barriers against the great transformation of agrarian to industrial societies amongst "late late industrialisers." The comparison between Brazil and India is particularly interesting, as both economies have substantially unaltered structures in their agrarian sectors. What then are the questions to ask which would address the question of the degree of industrial transformation in each society? It would be interesting to know whether there is greater penetration of the market in Brazil's hinterland, whether proto industrialization has emerged as an identifiable tendency in the rural areas, whether this has involved a change in ownership of those assets over which control is a prerequisite for industrialization (in other words, is the proto industrialization leading to upheavals in the agrarian property ownership structure) and so on. It is the answer to these and other questions, grounded in the realities of the lives of the peasantry and sharecroppers of agrarian societies, that would integrate Kohli's recognition of the deeply oppressive and undemocratic nature of the industrialization process into the general question of what today passes for "good governance" and respect for human rights.

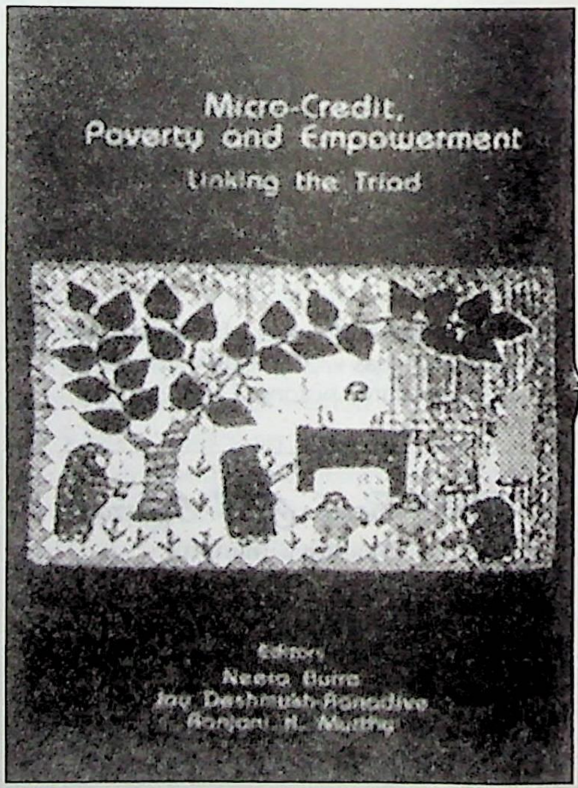
All in all, as this review noted at the start, Kohli's book is to be welcomed as a departure from the concentration of research on the "successful" cases of Third World industrialization, exemplified by the 1990s obsession with East Asia. It also avoids the enticing lure of concentrating on success stories within countries, such as that of the information technology industry in India. It is also, though less robustly, oriented away from neo liberal philosophy-based sagas of industrial success. Given this, it must be forgiven its imprints of the North American "tools" of political science.■

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Activist / Development Strategies In Micro-Finance

R. Srinivasan

MICRO-CREDIT, POVERTY AND EMPOWERMENT: LINKING THE TRIAD
Edited by Neera Burra, Joy Deshmukh-Ranadive and Ranjani K. Murthy
Sage Publications, Delhi, 2005, pp. 369, Rs. 395.00



The central issue addressed by this book, using six Indian case studies, is the impact of micro-credit (financial services for the poor) on poverty and women's empowerment.

The six case studies cover a range of organization forms. Micro-credit in India predominantly uses two group-lending models- the Self-Help Group [SHG] and the Grameen- and is usually focussed on women clients. Each SHG is a group of 12 to 20 women and this group is a micro-bank in that it accepts savings from, and lends to, its group members; and often borrows from other financial institutions. Some micro-credit institutions replicate the Bangaladesh Grameen model—typically, five-woman groups are formed, with eight groups affiliated into a centre. However, the group and centre are not micro-banks, the savings and loan portfolios are "domiciled" in the Grameen replicator. The centre is where, once a week, banking operations are conducted. Of the six micro-credit programmes studied, SML (Andhra Pradesh) and ASA (Tamil Nadu) are Grameen replicators. DHAN (South India) is a large not-for-profit and uses SHGs as do Lokadrusti (Orissa) and SSP (Maharashtra) which are somewhat smaller. SAPAP is a State-led initiative in Andhra Pradesh using SHGs.

Impact studies (see Aghion and Morduch[1]) use methodologies ranging from anecdotal to "hard-science" and are notoriously difficult to conduct. Essentially, one would like to state with confidence that clients of a micro-credit programme have seen significant increases in income or empowerment compared to clients without. This is easier said than done. One concern is whether there was an initial bias when clients were selected, in that the women with greater chance of success were selected (something that most managers with a sense of self-preservation will do). Another issue is attribution—how does one assert that it was micro-credit and not, say, the local dairy cooperative that helped incomes grow. Finally while income is relatively easy to define,

empowerment is not.

What makes synthesizing the findings of the six studies difficult is that they employ different methodologies. The methodologies vary from close to anecdotal to half-way to "hard-science." I have, personally, no problem with that—I do not suffer from 'physics-envy' and recognize that there are many possible ways of understanding social science phenomena. However, to complicate matters some of the studies involve people associated with the organization (as researcher or for data-collection). This raises concerns of objectivity.

The study of SAPAP (by Ranjani K. Murthy, K. Raju and Amitha Kamath) compares member status before and after intervention and the current status of members and non-members. I suspect this is a rigorous study——however, there is certain coyness in the presentation of results (a few tables would have helped) and one has to accept the inferences offered. What emerges is that SAPAP in a five-year period has changed the lives of members significantly. The study argues for combining capital formation, social mobilization and capacity building in any intervention for reducing women's poverty and empowering women. The study also argues that interventions need to be process-based and not (as with most state interventions) target-based.

The study of SML, by Anuradha Rajivan, devotes considerable space to a description of the organization. The reported interest rate of 15% charged by SML should be read with caution———this is 15% percent on a flat basis and closer to 30% in an annual compounded basis. What is both of interest and gets me worried is that while the organization does not emphasize women's empowerment and does not have special linkages with organizations that are involved in women's empowerment, the outcomes described here do not differ too much from that of SAPAP or that of DHAN (see below) an organization that invests significantly in social mobilization and empowerment.

Veena Padia gives roughly equal attention to the study of DHAN and to its impact. The DHAN Foundation has a complex intervention strategy. Rather than act only as a bank that accepts savings and lends money, DHAN nurtures a community banking system, managed by women, that operates at several levels: individual group, cluster and federation. Compared to using standalone groups, the DHAN approach provides members a significantly stronger support system.

The SSP study (by Soma Kishore Parthasarathy) begins by calling a spade a spade: it recognizes that groups are essentially savings and credit groups and not SHGs in the traditional sense. The study has a rich description of processes that goes well beyond narrating what is done. It also has a small section on why some women, who see being a member as beneficial, yet do not join a group.

The Lokadrusti study by Shashi Rajagopalan is very well written and allows the reader to understand how inferences have been made. The SHGs are not the only institution set up by the Lokadrusti in Orissa. There are also Muthi Chawals (grain banks) and the Mahila Samithi. The chapter also interestingly looks at the SHG, in part, as an outcome of poor cooperative legislation. With more liberal cooperative legislation now in place, Shashi Rajagopalan suggests that formal cooperatives, as an alternative to small groups, can provide lasting financial services.

ASA is an interesting illustration of organization evolution. Beginning as an activist organization it transformed itself into a Grameen style micro-finance institution but still going well beyond microfinance. The study (by Kalpana Sankar) concludes that microfinance alone is inadequate———enterprise development; asset creation and marketing support are also required.

The opening chapter provides the conceptual framework and the last chapter places the six case studies within this framework.

There are four major conclusions on micro-credit and poverty. The first is that development focus alone is not enough; an activist role by the intervening organization is useful in poverty reduction. While I would like to believe this, the fact that a higher proportion of ASA members experienced increases in income, compared to SML, may be because ASA has been around longer not because ASA has been activist. The second conclusion is that both the dimensions and causes of poverty need to be addressed. Thus both SAPAP and Lokadrusti not only addressed income increases but also paid attention to improving food security and children's access to education, and this was reflected in the impact on health, nutrition and educational levels. The third conclusion is the need to arrest expenditure leakages. By this is meant both spending on social evils and also not getting value for money. For example the Lokadrusti's Muthi Chawals ensure that people pay a lower price for food grain, allowing incomes to be stretched. A fourth is that "micro-credit programmes that target women, bring them into leadership positions and adopt pro-woman rules do play vital roles in reducing the feminization of poverty."

The impact of micro-credit on empowerment uses the notion of physical, economic, social-cultural and political spaces. Removing constrictions and expanding spaces is key to empowerment. The book argues that organizations that support expansion in several spaces have had a higher impact on empowerment. The book also argues for intervention at both domestic and macro-environmental levels and identifies mental space as central to expanding other spaces. A major strategy for expanding the mental space is collectivization, but collectivization has to ensure equitable access to space within the collective environment. I found that this section of the analysis was less grounded in the case studies than the poverty section. This observation applies also to the section on strategies to realize the potential of micro-credit. This section argues that micro-credit programmes should be preceded by social mobilization, that loans should be put to strategic uses that do not take for granted the existing distribution of resources and power, and resources should support women to assume equal space in public decision-making processes. While I agree with these, my agreement is borne out of instinct, not because the case studies have persuaded me.

Overall I would recommend this book to a microfinance practitioner with the hope that practitioners of "pure" microfinance will be encouraged to bring in partners with development/activist strategies.■

Reference

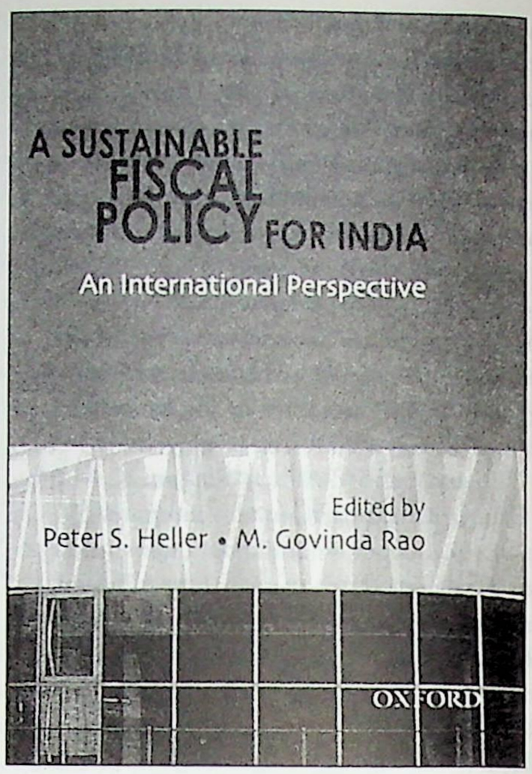
[1] *The Economics of Microfinance*, Beatriz Armendariz de Aghion and Jonathan Morduch, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT, 2005.

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Time To Bite The Bullet?

N. Chandra Mohan

A SUSTAINABLE FISCAL POLICY FOR INDIA: AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE
Edited by Peter S. Heller and M. Govinda Rao
Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2006, pp. 454, Rs. 695.00



With the Indian economy rebounding strongly, there is no doubt whatsoever that this provides a favourable conjuncture to tackle its fiscal challenges decisively. GDP growth of 8.1 per cent last fiscal and a 7 percent plus trajectory in prospect in 2006-07 and beyond does provide a context for lowering the government's fiscal and revenue deficits and reducing public debt levels relative to output. For such reasons, the recent Union budget for 2006-07 was expected to make a strong statement regarding the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government's intentions to address these fiscal challenges.

The big question naturally is whether the Union Finance Minister P. Chidambaram's budget does reflect such intentions? On the face of it, he has certainly managed to step up allocations for flagship National Common Minimum Programme (NCMP) schemes like the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme in 200 districts and Bharat Nirman to build national highways, rural roads, houses for the poor etc. At the same time, after a 'pause' in fiscal correction in 2005-06, he claims that the process has resumed to adhere to the timetable of the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act, 2004 (FRBM).

Thanks to the booming GDP growth, the Finance Minister has been able to show lower revenue and fiscal deficits in the current fiscal year itself. A revenue deficit is incurred when the government's tax revenues cannot meet its routine administrative expenditures like wages, salaries and subsidies. If it borrows, this is reflected in the fiscal deficit. According to the FRBM, the Centre's revenue deficit is to be reduced and completely eliminated by 2008-09. Towards this end, Chidambaram plans to cut the revenue deficit further to 2.1 per cent of GDP and the fiscal deficit to 3.8 per cent of GDP in 2006-07.

However, for all this budgetary tour de force, contributors to this publication under review like Professor Indira Rajaraman, for instance — remain unimpressed with the UPA government's commitment to fiscal adjustment. Her argument is that the targeted reduction in the revenue deficit should have been actually much deeper in 2006-07 than has been budgeted for in order to meet FRBM targets. Whether this deficit would be eliminated by 2008-09 is also an open question as national elections will be held a year earlier and there are strong political economy compulsions to loosen the purse strings.

Rajaraman's lead article in the publication 'Fiscal developments and outlook in India' indeed shows why she is worried about the government's commitment to deficit reduction as her findings indicate strong evidence for opportunistic electoral-cycle behaviour. Variations in fiscal stance between 1951-2001 have been underpinned by the election year response. The upward spike to the primary fiscal and revenue deficit has been as much as nine-tenths of a per cent of GDP and three quarters of one per cent of GDP. The FRBM thus is unlikely to serve as a bulwark against election year profligacy.

There are also five important state assembly elections this year that is also bound to exert similar pressures to boost public spending. Other contributors to this volume like Ricardo Hausmann and Catriona Purfield find that this bias towards high deficits stems from "strong institutional foundations" embedded in its highly decentralized democratic system. Accordingly, they advocate the need for ensuring an independent and accountable scorekeeper to monitor the government's compliance with the FRBM as the system raises the incentives for creative accounting to cover up missing the targets.

If this is the fiscal track-record since 1971, Chidambaram's poll-eve budgetary bonanza to the five states going to the polls this year and the promise of a Sixth Pay Commission made by the UPA government to central government employees and other giveaways to rural India thus is easily understandable as the compulsion behind such profligacy is only electoral gain. The fiscal consequences of such measures will be felt only over the medium-term as deficits crowd out resources that would otherwise have gone into investment. They thus threaten the sustainability of the growth momentum.

This book was the outcome of a conference in New Delhi in January 2004, jointly organized by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and National Institute of Public Finance and Policy and it brings together various papers presented at that conference. Some of these papers are highly insightful in understanding the UPA's current fiscal predicament, especially the Finance Minister's inability to effect deeper cuts in the revenue deficit, for instance. Although growth is contributing to buoyant tax revenues, the inflexible nature of non-plan revenue expenditures makes it difficult to cut the deficit.

Capping non-plan revenue spending on interest payments, wages and salaries of administration and subsidies have eluded most finance ministers till now, including Chidambaram. True to form, he announced no fresh measures to lower subsidies in his latest budget: "The issue of subsidies is proving to be a divisive one…I would urge Members to help the government evolve a consensus on the issue of subsidies". The revenue deficit thus may be budgeted at lower levels at 2.1 per cent of GDP in 2006-07 but there are no prizes for guessing that the revised estimates would be much higher.

This inability to address the subsidy question due to political economy reasons of pandering to the rural vote bank of rich agriculturists also happens to be a focus of Stephen Howes and Rinku Murgai in their essay on subsidies and salaries. While the scope of fiscal savings on non-plan revenue expenditures on subsidies thus is limited – as rightly argued by the authors — they are somewhat optimistic regarding the prospect of such savings in the salary bill. The UPA government's recent announcement of a Sixth Pay Commission is bound to complicate their argument in this regard.

If the government cannot meet its routine housekeeping expenditures with its tax revenues, it will perforce have to borrow. From where will the government then have the resources to fund plan spending on infrastructure development? Borrowings again. In this regard, Chidambaram made an interesting announcement in his latest budget that for the first time in 20 years the gross fiscal deficit was

less than the gross budgetary support for plan in 2004-05 — indicating that the government was not financing the Plan entirely through borrowings as before. This is good news indeed for the fisc.

For 2006-07 as well, the Finance Minister has budgeted for a lower gross fiscal deficit than the gross budgetary support for plan, which deserves to be welcomed as it will slow down the build-up of debt. The royal road to finance the Plan is, of course, to generate a surplus on the revenue account that will obviate the need to resort to market borrowings. Only then, will there be a kickstart to growth from budgetary resources. In its absence, the Finance Minister shows a lower fiscal deficit largely through a compression of much-needed capital spending, which is not good for sustaining the growth momentum.

Sadly, this is true of the 2006-07 budget as well. There are no prizes for guessing that a strongly rebounding economy has reduced the sense of urgency in attempting short-term or medium-term fiscal adjustment. "The beauty of India's fiscal deficit is that somehow the consequences of the lack of fiscal prudence aren't showing up. But that said, we would be making a mistake not to deal with the fiscal issue on a priority basis", stated IMF's Raghuram Rajan when he took over as the chief economist. Most of the contributors to this publication also feel that there is no sense of urgency to address India's fiscal challenges.

While India thus continues to register a 7 per cent plus growth trajectory, the upshot is that its sustainability over the medium-term is hardly assured unless its fiscal challenges are addressed on a war footing. An interesting contribution is from Richard Hemming and Nouriel Roubini who argue in their article on "A balance sheet crisis in India?" that despite accelerating growth to 8 per cent in Argentina investors were concerned about the sustainability of debt as the primary balance remained in negative territory. Faster growth in India, too, is unlikely to ease investors' concerns for similar reasons!

India's indicators like the fiscal deficit and primary deficit, public debt as a share of GDP, hot money inflows and so on "look as bad, and often worse, relative to other emerging economies that experienced severe sovereign debts servicing problems", according to Hemming and Roubini. India thus may well be vulnerable to a financing crisis without fiscal adjustment. Peter Heller, too, argues that unless India tackles its fiscal challenges, it will lack the "leeway" to handle challenges like demographics of civil and military pensions, climate change, effects of globalization etc. The current favourable conjuncture of booming growth thus must be seized to bite the fiscal bullet. Or else…

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On Strategies And Limitations

D. Narasimha Rao

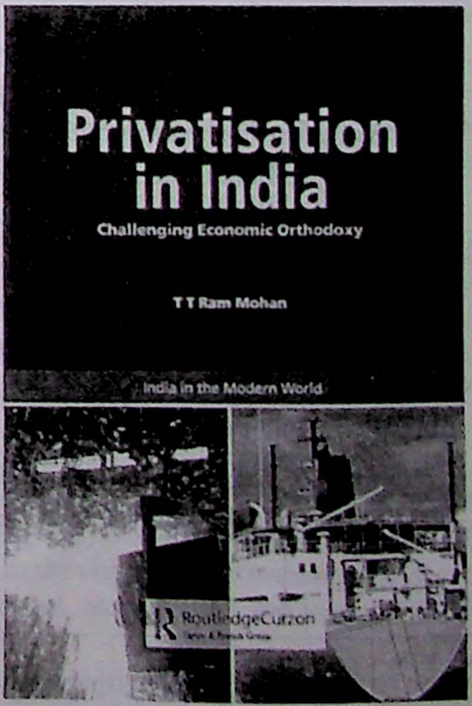
PRIVATIZATION IN INDIA: CHALLENGING ECONOMIC ORTHODOXY
By T.T. Ram Mohan
RoutledgeCurzon, 2005, pp. 218, Rs. 595.00

Privatization of State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) increasingly dominated the policy canvas for the better part of a decade until the coming of the UPA coalition. The previous BJP-led government made sweeping privatization of non-core SOEs its mission, with fair number of sales, until its denouement with the HPCL/ BPCL controversy. Thereafter, Manmohan Singh's government pulled back the privatization reins. In this whole period, one would have thought a plethora of debate and analysis would emerge around the merits and conditions favouring private sector operation. Sadly, ideology and turf-war politics have dominated the discourse. On the one hand, the Disinvestment Ministry boasted about the profitability of strategic sales of SOEs, while the Left lamented the garage sale of well-performing public assets. The only substantive questions debated were, should profit-making or loss-making SOEs be privatized, should privatization take place through public offerings or strategic sales? In essence, the questions revolved around fiscal needs. Nobody questioned the implications of these privatization methods on firm behaviour and performance—the ostensible basis for privatization in the first place. These were taken for granted, or perpetuated by unsubstantiated myths, promises and ideology.

T.T. Ram Mohan's *Privatization in India* is a refreshing and much-needed effort to debunk some of these myths through evidence-based analysis. His book focuses on the fundamentals of firm performance in India under public and private operation, by revisiting theory, surveying past empirical work and conducting a detailed statistical study of his own on Indian companies. Some of the myths he debunks are: privately held firms are inherently more efficient than SOEs; privately held firms, but not SOEs, can operate with autonomy, offer pecuniary incentives to employees, and face market discipline; disinvestments of minority shares has little impact on firm performance; conversely, the influence of private ownership only manifests when majority control is transferred; private monopolies perform better than public monopolies; SOEs cannot perform well in competitive markets.

His review of theory and past empirical work raises known caveats to the assumed superiority of private operation. These caveats include external and internal factors; externally, private firm performance depends on the presence of competition supported by strong regulatory and judicial systems; internally, SOEs can build a profit-orientation, while private firms suffer their own governance failures, to a greater extent than is assumed. His contribution in this regard is to provide empirical bases and insights specific to the Indian context. SOEs have well-known agency failures due to multiple ownership and soft budget constraints. Indian privately held firms suffer from a lack of management accountability, due largely to entrenched management by industrial houses with dominant shareholding. They are difficult to dislodge through takeover, often have opportunities for exploiting minority shareholder interests, and face little institutional activism. Thus, there is very little a priori basis to expect superior firm performance from the private sector, in similar market conditions.

The unique contribution of this book is Ram Mohan's three statistical studies of firm performance. The first compares firm performance of all privately held companies, except financial service, and 227 SOEs in three distinct time periods over 11 years (89-00, 92-00, 95-00). By segmenting his analysis into these time blocks, he is able to study trends in performance, and assess the influence of market conditions on relative performance. In the second study he assesses firm performance of 36



privatized companies pre- and post-privatization (including minority equity shares). He also conducts similar studies of the banking sector. In all studies, he uses standard financial measures of profitability and efficiency and statistical significance. He also supplements these financial measures with input and output quantity-based indicators of performance using Data Envelope Analysis (DEA).

Ram Mohan finds that there is little evidence to support the claim that the private sector uniformly outperforms SOEs. In the full time period (89-00) private sector firms exhibit better performance overall, but the difference converges with time, particularly in the post-reforms period. He rightly focuses on performance trends, rather than on the absolute performance, since liberalization gave select SOEs opportunities to re-orient themselves. He attributes this to increased freedom in pricing under competition, increased autonomy granted by government, and an imbibed profit-orientation in many SOEs. He provides a useful sectoral disaggregation of his results. In several sectors, not just those where SOEs enjoy monopolistic benefits (such as petroleum and telecom), SOEs perform better.

In his analysis of pre- and post-privatization performance, Ram Mohan finds that on average performance has not improved considerably, though 21 of 36 firms exhibit improvement in 3 or more out of six indicators. Generally, broadening shareholding directed management toward profit-making among their diverse objectives. He finds that of those SOEs whose performance deteriorated, some did poorly due to capital constraints or were not able to take advantage of freedoms conferred by deregulation.

An interesting insight gained is that private sector performance has been tardy in all but the electronics and services sector. Performance has on average been poorer in the second half of the nineties relative to the first half. Privatization must therefore focus on sectors where the private sector has demonstrated good performance.

Ram Mohan acknowledges that fiscal pressures have driven privatization. With less detail and empirical survey, he contends that even this objective has hardly been achieved. Applying auction theory, he suggests that the Government shortchanged itself through poor auction design. Here, it is tempting to say that a greater empirical focus may have strengthened his reasoning. He may have used benchmarks or extrapolations of post-sale performance trends to buttress theory. He also omitted an analysis of the potential value of privatizing loss-making SOEs, who may arguably be the best candidates for private takeover, since, from a fiscal perspective, they would be worth giving away.

To the extent that policymakers have pursued privatization primarily to raise funds, this study provide useful insights to guide policy on the strategy and limitations of privatization. India's fiscal position can be bolstered equally by reforming SOEs to operate with greater autonomy and transparency, and by increasing institutional shareholding.

The empirical analysis of privatization is critical to raise flags of caution in an increasingly ideological debate. The book provides much-needed reasoning and evidence to support the lone, fast-diminishing voice of SOE reform. This evidence includes an interesting tangential insight into the success of SOE reform in China.

What is needed to build on Ram Mohan's work is a political and broader welfare analysis of specific privatizations, of the type conducted by Vogelsang et al in the early nineties. What were the processes undergone during privatization transactions? Who gained and who lost from transactions that defied reason and historical precedence? Finally, this book doesn't have the scope to address specialized monopoly industries that are undergoing or facing privatization, such as electricity and water. These are in urgent need of the kind of illumination this book provides.

Overall, this book reads well. It comprehensively and succinctly presents theoretical and empirical literature on private vs. public sector performance. Its detailed chapters contain summaries, and follow up with a summary chapter. This enables academics as well as laypersons to extract the essence of this book at their own pace and depth.■

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K.K. Birla Foundation Fellowship in Comparative Indian Literature

In 1994 the K.K. Birla Foundation had instituted a Fellowship programme for higher studies in the field of Comparative Indian Literature. This Fellowship is being given by the Foundation for developing studies in this new discipline. The object of the Fellowship is to provide opportunity to eminent scholars, teachers, writers etc. to undertake indepth study of serious subjects in Comparative Indian Literature, a new and growing academic discipline. The duration of the fellowship is one year and it carries a tax free stipend of Rs. 14,000 per mensem with a contingency grant of Rs. 40,000 for the year.

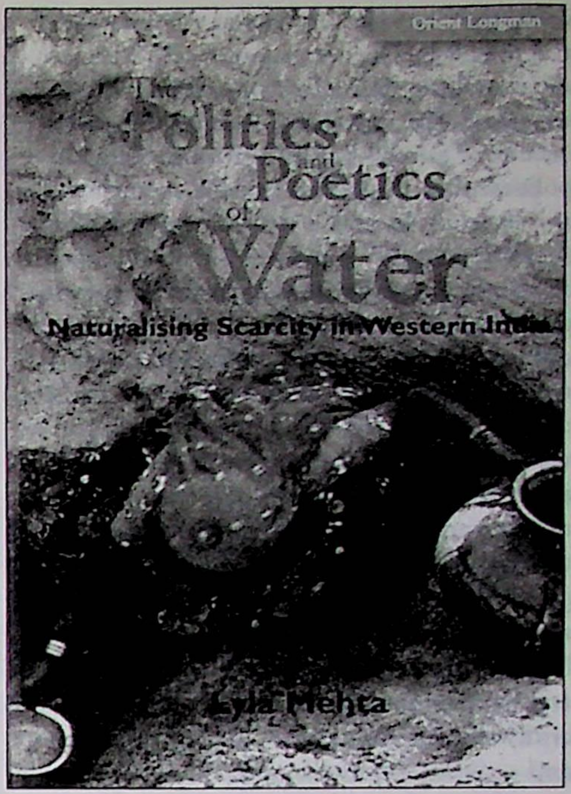
The selection for the Fellowships is not made by the Foundation but by an independent Selection Board consisting of eminent scholars headed by Professor Nabaneeta Dev Sen, Head (Retd.), Department of Comparative Indian Literature, Jadavpur University, Kolkata. The other members are Dr. Chandrakant Bandivadekar, Tagore Professor (Retd.) of Comparative Literature, Professor Krishna Dutt Paliwal, Department of Hindi, University of Delhi, Delhi and Professor K. Satchidanandan, Secretary, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi.

So far 21 Fellows have completed their studies. The studies of the 10 Fellows have already been published. Some of the other studies are with the publishers and are expected to be published soon.

Competing Demand And Management Practices

Velayuthan Saravanan

THE POLITICS AND POETICS OF WATER: NATURALISING SCARCITY IN WESTERN INDIA
By Lyla Mehta
Orient Longman, Hyderabad, 2005, pp.396, Rs.695.00



In recent decades, scarcity of water has been experienced due to an increasing trend in competing demands of the different stakeholders in different countries leading to a number of conflicts within the basin, between the basins of the state and between the states and countries. It has now been aggravated manifold due to the demand from different users like agriculture and industry besides domestic water supply. Increasing demand for fresh water on one hand and limited as well as polluted water supply on the other hand have made the situation worse in recent years in most of the developing countries. The problem has now been further aggravated owing to the decline of water quality due to pollution invariably by the different users, resulting in 'water market'. Diverting the water, particularly through the larger dams from the natural flow of the river to the new areas has also become very difficult from the ecological and environment and displacement and rehabilitation point of view. Given the macro view, the book attempts to establish the reasons for water scarcity due to competing demand and management practices from the perspectives of social and power relations from the context of the controversial Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP) in the Kutch region of Gujarat in Western India.

This book consists of nine chapters. In the first chapter Mehta introduces the research problem from the context of the ongoing debate on the large dams; the factors causing water scarcity and how this water scarcity has been manufactured by the different actors and the impact of state intervention and how the scarcity was naturalized. She attempts to establish how the scarcity was linked with the local institutions, caste, gender, religion, socio-economic, culture, politics and traditional knowledge at the village and regional level using different methods i.e., participatory observation, oral history and archival records.

In the second chapter, the author describes her stay in the village, the experiences she has gained from the different groups of people, the nature of polarization among the different caste people and the nature of politics at the village level in a novelistic narration. Unfortunately, this chapter has not given anything about the subject of the book except caste, gender, cultural and behaviour pattern of the different groups of people from the angles of the author's perception and opinion.

A historical account of changing landscape and socio-cultural identity and political development of Kutch district from the ancient period is provided next. Further, it describes how water scarcity was managed by constructing different dams and digging wells and ponds ad hoc and on a seasonal basis and its present status, focusing on the period from the late nineteenth century to early independence. Further, it also captures the history of drawing water from outside the boundary from the late nineteenth century from the Indus river and from SSP after Independence and, how a series of promises were made over the period and how it was broken at different points of time by the negligence of the state politicians and how the people became accustomed to water scarcity in the Kutch region.

The fourth chapter gives the geographical features of the village, settlement of different religious and caste groups in the village, hierarchies, socio-economic conditions for each major group and migration trend besides gender dimensions among the different groups and between castes/ groups. It also captures the differences based on the economic conditions and party basis among the different castes and groups. Further, it recounts how the land was controlled by the erstwhile powerful communities despite effective land reform measures in this village.

The fifth chapter analyses the use of water and water related practices and its distinguished characteristics with the different religious groups, how the village drinking water sources were managed by the different social groups and what kind of institutional setup there was and how state intervention measures created a social change among the different sections of the society. How the village common water resources like tanks and wells were managed and used by the different social groups is analysed, what kind of differences have prevailed and how it became neglected over the period; traditional knowledge to identify the water sources and their beliefs and how the technological intrusion led to the decline of water table polarized by the differences and how the state-sponsored drinking water supply scheme has changed the differences from the caste, wealth, gender and political point of view besides establishing the high degree of naturalization of gender differentials.

The daily practices and coping strategies of the people to meet both ecological and livelihood uncertainties within the realm of dry land agriculture and pastoral livelihood practices during the scarcity period based on the villages and regional level is the next topic under discussion. Mehta recounts how the traditional beliefs from the socio-cultural and religious point of view give a confidence to meet the scarcity and uncertainty. She describes how in dry land agriculture the farmers have adopted different strategies – large and scattered parcels, crop rotation, and storage – to overcome the risks and uncertainties. The chapter also describes the variation of options of coping strategies between the rich and poor and the differences between caste and gender to access and control over the resources. In a pastoral economy, the challenges are multidimensional both from the ecological and institutional points of view and hence they were marginalized and shifted to other occupations without state intervention. Mehta also observes that despite the large extent of dry land agriculture and pastoral economy the state emphasis is on irrigation. Daily practices and coping strategies were changed over the period due to the change in the socio-economic, ecological, technological and institutional factors.

The seventh chapter is on how the notion of

water scarcity was contrived as a popular issue and established to necessitate the SSP Project substantiating through various factors like, water-induced migration, over grazing and decline of rainfall by the different actors like politicians, out-migrants, media representatives and different locality people of the region. The supporters of SSP projected the out-migration and seasonal migration despite the population growth, and inappropriately linked the issues of overgrazing with desertification and environment and dwindling of rainfall against the fact to stress the project. As against the popular view, the author has brought out clearly how the human-induced factors like commercialization of forests, overexploitation of groundwater, water mismanagement, changing cropping-pattern etc. are ignored to address water scarcity. She has also brought out what the logistical and technical problems involved are, and gives an interesting picture of how despite criticisms from academics, human rights groups and activists, the media and politicians have manufactured popular perceptions to legitimize the controversial SSP, ignoring the real factors as well as benefactors and demonstrates how politicians, businessman, industrialist and voluntary organizations have benefited out of that.

How scarcity and drought were viewed during the pre-independence regime and how it has changed and naturalized these issues due to the inappropriate intervention measures of the state institutions forms the subject of the eighth chapter, besides the institutional weakness during the post-independence period. During the pre-Independence period, the rulers had initiated both relief measures – duty exemption, remission, distribution of fodder and credit facilities -- and development measures – digging wells, desilting tanks and wells – in an ad hoc manner. The author captures carefully how the scarcity and drought relief measures ignored the regional specificities, false prioritization of development schemes due to political intervention and how it is mismanaged and corrupted and who benefited and how it reinforced the local political rivalries which culminated in the naturalization of scarcity during the post-independence period. Further, she points out that the 'dryland blindness of planners' on irrigation projects have ignored the agro-pastoralists and dry land cultivators, ineffective regulation of groundwater, particularly borewells affecting the drinking water supply besides expansion of industrialization led to naturalization of water scarcity. The last chapter reiterates her argument despite suggesting some policy implications.

This book gives an interesting and distinct dimension and insight to the ongoing debate on water problems. However, it has some problems, which the author could have avoided easily. For instance, the third chapter gives a long historical account about the changing landscape and socio-economic cultural identity of the Kutch region and their political development which takes away from the focus of the book. Though the author claims that she has used archival sources she has actually ended up using published materials and has reconstructed several arguments mostly based on interviews from people's oral history. The same issues are repeated in several places (specifically see p.138) and different forms of presentations are used in each chapter i.e., in some chapters, sections are introduced and in some chapters conclusions are introduced much to the confusion of the readers. The chapters are ill constructed as there is too much of back and forth in presentation of arguments. However, this book will be useful in understanding the water problems at the village level and how politics has played with the issue and therefore an important contribution to the ongoing debate on water scarcity at the global level.■

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Zoning In On A Talisman

Harsh Sethi

FROM THE RAMPARTS
By Ashok Mitra
Tulika Books, Delhi, 2006, pp. 268, Rs. 450.00

Not too many of us may remember the journalism of the early seventies. In part because those were tumultuous and troubling times a world apart from the current obsessions with India shining or as a superpower in the making. Even as the then Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, was consolidating her image as a left of centre, populist and nationalist politician – via *garibi hatao*, bank nationalization, abolition of privy purses and, above all, inflicting a resounding defeat on Pakistan and helping the birth of Bangladesh – there were magazines that struck a critical and contrarian chord. Foremost among them was the *Economic and Political Weekly*, which alongside *Mainstream*, *Frontier*, and *Seminar* became mandatory reading for young radicals.

The more scholarly may have appreciated the EPW for its eclectic collection of academic articles, but even those of us unable to follow the more dense offerings looked forward eagerly to the trenchant columns and indepth field reportage from the troubled zones of the country, areas and people which did not quite share the euphoria of the ruling party. Undoubtedly, the star performer among a galaxy of notables was Ashok Mitra writing as AM. His 'Calcutta Diary' formed the staple for intense weekly discussion as he ripped apart the foibles and pretensions of the ruling elite.

Even today, three decades later, those of us who came of age in those engaged times – the movements for land and wages, the Naxalite uprising, the Railway Strike, the Gujarat and Bihar movements, and the list is unending, as also the repression and crackdown by a beleagured political class culminating in the Emergency – can remember many of the trenchant and often prescient essays.

Then, as now, it was intriguing to learn that these essays, invariably biting and polemical in the best sense were penned, not by a disillusioned radical innocent of the complexities of modern day governance but by an economist who had served at senior levels in government and helped in policy-making, both at home and abroad. Even more amazing was the range – 'politics and sports, commoners to corporations, poetry to processions, local to global' – surely not the staple of economists. And the edge in the writings came not just from the fact that Mitra was associated with the CPI(M), subsequently going on to serve as Finance Minister with the Left Front government of West Bengal. What marked the essays out was not a 'party line' but 'an over-riding sympathy for the underdog and a corrosive contempt for the forces poisoning the existence of man.'

From the Ramparts represents a selection of Ashok Mitra's writings in the *EPW* from 1999-2003. Yet any expectation that the passage of time or the years spent as Finance Minister managing the contradictory impulses of being both in power (in West Bengal) and opposition (nationally) would have mellowed AM is rapidly dispelled. If anything, Mitra remains steadfast in his opposition to the hegemonic tendency of neo-liberal economic thinking and policy-making that has come to characterize our efforts at planned development. And though he, at least in this selection, sidesteps the vexed issues arising out of Left Front practice – one can only speculate as to what he might have to say about the mode of city planning in Kolkata, the slum demolition and pavement clearing drives, the blocking off and sale of large parcels of land to real-estate developers, the sorry state of primary education and health in West Bengal, the steady accommodation of foreign capital in industry and services, the hiring of Mckenzie Consulting to help reform government administration and so on – the tenor of writings remains consistent.

This, in someways is a major shortcoming, probably reflective of the self-censorship practised by the party faithful. Consequently Mitra fails to analyse the implications of a three decade unbroken rule by a single party, the arrogance that seeps into the party cadre, the ruthlessness with which dissent is crushed and so on. Equally, he avoids engaging with the many debates about the path of development the LF government seems to be pursuing and whether, if subjected to the same criteria of assessment that he uses against other parties and regimes, the LF halo and claims to difference would remain intact.

It is difficult, if not impossible to choose essays out of this engaging collection. Most expectedly they engage with economic choices and almost invariably are dismissive of the preferred choice set of the mandarins running the Finance Ministry and Planning Commission. They also, in today's context, come across as ideologically over-determined. But we encounter a somewhat different AM when reading him on social concerns (The left-behind parents) or on individuals who fitted his image of concerned and committed activist scholars – be it Paul Sweezy or Arvind Das and Pradhan H. Prasad, or even individuals like Sailen Das who would have been strangers to all but their immediate circle. One can't help but contrast these social history obituaries with Mitra's 'less than gentlemanly' appreciation of Indira Gandhi post her assassination in 1984. There the bile was difficult to hide. But then, as Mitra would exclaim, 'I'm not a gentleman. I am a Communist.' Even less excusable was his column on the unwell Dharma Kumar, remembering her more as a social butterfly than a first-rate historian and teacher.

At a phase in our national history when we seem more concerned with the behaviour of the Sensex than farmers' suicides in Vidarbha, when page 3 happenings like the murder of Jessica Lall and the subsequent acquittal of all the accused give rise to more concerted demands for the reform of the criminal justice system that the presence of thousands of undertrials in jail, many having already served longer sentences than warranted by the petty crimes they are accused off – the Mitra style of social commentary may appear out of sync with the times. One may well ask as to what we are expected to make of an old style leftist when the Marxist ideology itself is under strain and most regimes claiming alliegance to the 19th century revolutionary thinkers stand accused of grave human rights violations. Equally, just targeting the US, particularly under George W., and the 'infamous troika' of the World Bank-IMF-WTO, as so many of our anti-imperialist iconoclasts do, appears intellectually lazy. This while admitting that the continuing mess in Iraq and Afghanistan does much to discredit the global project of democracy and freedom. Yet, to give in to fashionable postmodernism and moral relativism that marks the writings of so many of our younger scholars is hardly an answer.

Going back to reading Ashok Mitra in these morally hazy times, though difficult, is necessary. Quibbles over language and formulations apart, or even his preferred economics, he invariably steers us back to the needed talisman – Is what we advocate, be it nationalization of social assets or the World Bank favoured mantra of liberalization, privatization and globalization, likely to help the poor and the under-dog? For only, if they are free to make their own destiny, can even we, the relatively privileged, stand a chance. This we can forget only at our own peril.■

Harsh Sethi is with *Seminar*.

An Out of the Ordinary Life



Latika Padgaonkar

I, DURGA KHOTE: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY
Translated from Marathi by Shanta Gokhale with an Introduction by Gayatri Chatterjee
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006, pp.193, Rs. 295.00

A veteran actress with a career that stretched over fifty years, both before and after Independence, Durga Khote (née Laud) lived and worked through some of the momentous phases in India's artistic history—the zenith of the Marathi theatre, the coming of the talkies and of colour in the cinema among others. In many ways, her life was out of the ordinary. Born into a wealthy, upper-class if socially conservative Saraswat family from Mumbai, she gathered the guts to walk out of the narrow circumference described by the Lauds and the Khotes and step in front of a movie camera, the first woman from a respectable background to do so. She was associated with Prabhat Films and knew Bal Gandharva—the idol of the Marathi stage. Whether out of financial necessity after marriage or her own determination (a bit of both, surely), she carried on acting after her marriage and motherhood, even as she watched her younger son sink into emotional instability. Her second marriage, after the death of her first husband, was with a Muslim. She launched her own Durga Khote Productions at a time when no other actress had dared to do so, and made documentary films. She was part of—and even headed—government delegations to various countries, attended a UNESCO Conference on Women. She acted in some 120 films—some Marathi, but mainly Hindi—often embodying strong characters. Durga Khote was a woman of many hats and many roles – stern, matriarchal, weepy, martial, queenly, compassionate and heroic.

Her autobiography is simple, straightforward, chronological. It begins with her pampered childhood in Bombay's Kandewadi, surrounded by a large fun-loving joint family ("intelligent, generous, large-hearted, but slothful – infected by the idleness of the wealthy, the extravagant pleasures of the rich and false notions of prestige") living together in a rambling mansion. Her father owned horses, cars, even a silver Rolls Royce. Her westernized mother imposed English at home, food was served English-style, complete with liveried waiters; yet she inculcated in the children "beliefs, customs and culture of our ancient civilisation" while giving them a modern education and insisting on values of "homework, tidiness, respect for elders, obedience and punctuality." Khote's schooling in Cathedral made her "snooty", and with time alienated her from her cousins.

Perhaps the most endearing childhood note is her passion for theatre, which she inherited from her father. Together they saw umpteen plays, were dear friends of Bal Gandharva (the Laud and Khote families even helped him out in a time of crisis).

Events of India's independence movement were a distant echo. "Not a hint of what was happening in the country reached me. Nobody at home...bothered much about politics...If political events were taking place in the country, so be it." With this kind of indifference, her description of the freedom struggle rings untrue. She is suddenly spellbound by the oratory of Lala Lajpat Rai, C. R. Das, Motilal Nehru. Overnight, the atmosphere in Cathedral – so British, so beloved – becomes "intolerable". Her flirtation with wanting to serve the country when she is in college is short-lived. In no time she is weaned back to her studies.

It is with her marriage at 17 that the full-blooded, golden years of her life come to an end. One gold strand continues as her acting career takes shape. But now enter heavier threads in the shape of a cheerfully irresponsible, unemployed husband, illiberal in-laws who curb her acting ambitions and a father-in-law who loses his wealth at the stock market. To boot, society tears her to shreds because she has played a tiny role in *Farebi Jaal*, quite unaware that the film contains scenes of "drunkenness, sex, lewd gestures, love games, women smoking."

When Shantaram casts her in *Ayodhyecha Raja*, she can hardly refuse. Thereafter, her life is a tussle between shooting schedules out of Mumbai, an in-absentia motherhood, the unexpected death of Vishwanath Khote (she calls him Mr Khote in the book), rearing her children with her parents' help, her second marriage to the prodigal Mohammad Rashid, and their subsequent drifting apart. Her children grow up, marry. Durge Khote is hurt when her daughters-in-law don't share her zeal for her production company, never pausing to reflect if her personality has anything to do with them moving away. And she is "aghast" when – following the tragic death of her younger son at the age of 36 – her daughter-in-law Vjaya marries Farrokh Mehta. Her mind appears to have blanked out her own second marriage.

I, Durga Khote is a matter-of-fact account that does little justice to an actress of such enormous talent. Her style is crackling dry, her approach self-centred. Her long career in cinema gives us few insights into the workings of the industry, apart from telling us that rivalry and irregular lives of actors and actresses left them with little time for love or friendship. While she certainly acknowledges having learnt from Shantaram that acting "had to be natural and attractive", her accent is on how the world moved and swirled to make her happy and comfortable. Whether it was her father or a film crew, Krishna Menon in London or Rabindranath Tagore in Shantiniketan, Durga Khote is always at the heart of the tale, encouraged and aided and supported in every way by others. What did she do for them? Little, it appears. Wasn't it enough that she was a diva? "The audience fell in love with my role" (in *Maya Macchindra*); "they showered me with extravagant praise" (for her role as Kaikeyi); "People began to shower me with praise, accolades and admiration. The public granted me success and acceptance" (for *Ayodhyecha Raja*).

Consider her account of the new flat she and Rashid moved into. It was given to Rashid by the Air Force, and her son Harin—a neglected and turbulent child, in need of his mother's love—was not permitted to stay there (Khote never explains why). "I felt terrible about it," writes Khote in one short sentence, "but there was no way out until we could find another flat."

At one point, she is injured in a plane crash at Juhu from a height of 250 feet. Enough to rattle you out of your wits. "God knows how I survived. The poor pilot suffered a serious back injury and he was in bed for six months. I had a lot of bruises on my head and lost a lot of blood. There was consternation in the film industry. I had four films on hand. Fortunately, I was able to return to work within a month and nobody suffered losses."

Durga Khote's first encounter with Europe yields commonplace observations: at the international film festival of Venice, her delegation was "welcomed…with great honour. Our invitation cards were taken away from us and we were given our seat numbers and bouquets of flowers. The usher led us to our seats. The theatre was choc-a-bloc with famous artists from all over the world. The women's outfits, hairstyles and jewellery were designed to outdo each other. Yet they reflected the wearer's individuality. The whole gathering looked like a fashion parade. Many of the films were black and white. Colour had not arrived in cinema in a big way yet. It was nearly daybreak by the time the evening's programme ended. When the audience emerged, the sun's rays were already lighting up the eastern sky. Back in the hotel, I rushed through my bath and went out once again for breakfast and to see the sights of Venice. As I left Venice, I wished I could have taken the same gondola all the way to meet Bakul and Harin." That's the festival; that's Venice for you.

Such artless reporting, devoid of the intensities that must have been the stuff of her career, bespeaks a mind that is tenacious but aloof; it is a mind that skims over things, yet is sentimental. "I have managed to endure many of life's cruellest strokes by drowning myself in those memories (of innocent joy, sweetness and enthusiasm). Even the unceasing flow of tears from my eyes has not washed them away." By the final pages of the book, though, she does recognize the web of isolation she spun around herself. She confesses (but it changes little for the reader who, by now, has a fair picture of Durga Khote the woman) that her hectic life left her no time for "stability or close relationships – relationships have to be nurtured, feelings cherished. I could never do that…I made mistakes. I was not always reasonable in my actions," and consequently her life was spent without any true friend.

A curiously flat book that comes alive only in one domain: theatre. It's Durga Khote's engagement with the Marathi stage that brings out the *rasik* in her. While claiming that theatre was "only a pastime" and regretting that she had no knowledge of music or drama, she does make pertinent observations on actors and companies. Of Bal Gandharva she says: "Narayanrao's body had a softness that made it perfect for female roles. His movements were so graceful and attractive that even the most beautiful women of the time attempted to model themselves on him. There was no trace of theatricality or affectation in the way Narayanrao carried himself…Off-stage he looked tall and was of medium-build, with not a hint of effeminacy. There was only one exception, his long hair, which was knotted and pushed under his black fur cap. He did not go anywhere without the cap. Apart from this, he did not affect any physical gestures or mannerisms of the kind displayed by other actors who played female roles. His female roles were his profession."

It would have been interesting to delve a little deeper into the heated debates on the subject of men playing female roles. But apart from remarking that "there was nothing even remotely perverse or unnatural in the way Narayanrao played his heroines", the argument is not pursued. Khote, does, though, comment on the idol's decline: "…by the time I entered films, Narayanrao's acting style had changed drastically. Gone were his modest deportment and chaste gestures. They had been replaced now by a charade of vulgar mannerisms. He would stand on tiptoe, jump about, move his neck coyly this way and that, giggle frivolously and stress the wrong words to pervert the meaning of lines…"

A word about the translation. Without having read the original, it is transparent that veteran translator Shanta Gokhale has been fair to the original Marathi. You can feel it in the cadence of the text, in the language that scarcely moves you, in the style that is shorn of real emotion. If there is little to invigorate you, blame it on the original. Gokhale's version faithfully mirrors an off-screen personality quite different from Khote's screen persona. Of particular note is Gayatri Chatterjee's introductory essay, which raises appropriate questions on "Personal Writing and The Archive of the Self". It also speaks about other autobiographies by women. Pity that a reader may find it hard to agree with her lucid comments on Khote's life and writing. In reality *I Durga Khote* is more of a factual account than a felt one.■

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Please note

The Book Review May 2006 issue is South Asia Special No. VII. Book your order now.

Where Does The Magic Lie?

Narendra Panjwani

BEHIND THE SCENES OF HINDI CINEMA
Edited by J. Manschot & Marijke De Vos
KIT Publishers, Amsterdam, 2005, pp. 160, E35.00

In the Global Village, 'India' Today Is a Movie. The 'core problem' with Hindi cinema continues: it is too simplistic, too vulgar, too loud, and too popular. In a word, it is too 'foreign' for the denizens of academia – in Mumbai, Delhi, Amsterdam, Leiden, London, as much as Los Angeles. And yet…they (I should really say 'we') are fascinated by Bollywood's enduring presence, and its growing popularity in the global village.

As an American journalist warned his readers recently:

> While Hollywood is dragged down with exorbitant production costs, Bollywood makes and distributes as many movies as it pleases. And people watch them. Lots of people. Over half the world's population finds their primary source of entertainment in Indian celluloid.
>
> (Sam Wardle, *aWorldConnected.org*, October, 2004)

Half the world's population; three billion people? Really? What are Mr Wardle's data sources? He doesn't cite any, but you don't have to take his claim literally. Taken metaphorically, it tells us that Bollywood has gone and set the cat among the American pigeons.

Meanwhile back at home, one still can't help feeling that Hindi cinema should surely not be our best-known cultural *signifier* nationally and internationally, given its low pedigree. But it is.

Yes of course there is place in this 'room' for Sri Sathya Sai Baba and other godmen/women, for great artists like Rabindranath Tagore, Jamini Roy, Amrita Shergil, M.F. Husain, M.S. Subbalaxmi and Bhimsen Joshi, for Yoga, for the *Gita*, for Tukaram and Mahatma Gandhi, for R.K. Narayan, Satyajit Ray, Ravi Shankar, and much else. But Amitabh Bachchan and the celluloid 'world' he represents are nine-tenths of this room, whether you like it or not.

Over the last five years, the small rain-fed backwater of books on Indian cinema has now become a river in flood! There are already two encyclopedias on Hindi phillums alone, both with a respectable British stamp on them. The French and the Americans can be expected to upstage them in the near future. Here's how the *Encyclopedia Britannica* justifies bringing out its special volume on Hindi cinema in 2004:

> The excitement of cinema is the pulse of the Indian nation. There is nothing quite like it in the world.

Given such hype, some curiosity about looking behind the scenes of Hindi cinema to figure out its sources, and what keeps it going from one era to another, seems only natural. J.Manschot & Marijke De Vos's book, *Behind the Scenes of Hindi Cinema* is a product of just this growing international interest in Hindi cinema. This edited anthology—which has grown out of a conference in Amsterdam—concentrates on the visual language of Hindi cinema, and that is the book's strongest feature. The editors must be thanked for having put together a rare and special collection of historic and contemporary film stills, poster images and street scenes pertaining to Hindi and Tamil cinema.

Yes, this book on Hindi cinema has an interesting essay titled 'Tamil Cinema – The Significant Other'. Its author Soudhamini tells us:

> Tamil culture is essentially expressive and celebratory by nature. Bright colours, loud gestures and spontaneous, untrammeled emotionalism mark social interaction – from the most intimate to casual and passing relationships. The food is filled with complex tastes, flowers are enjoyed as much for their colour as for their smell, and women wear them in profusion in their hair throughout the year….It is a sensuous culture, which believes in demonstrating its emotions at all times, be they tragic, comic, aggressive, moralistic or even demonic…
> The technology of cinema may have been invented in France, but in Tamil Nadu its aesthetics are derived directly from traditional art forms such as: therukoothu, folk theatre; isai natakam, musical theatre; harikatha, the oral storytelling tradition; and silambattam, a traditional martial art using sticks. In this respect, the fact that it is a regional cinema has helped, rather than hindered, its growth.

This quality of engagement with the subject is welcome. But it is missing in most of the other essays, which are recycled versions of their own earlier writings by contributors like P.K. Nair, Gayatri Chatterjee and Nasreen Munni Kabir.

The book's *Foreword* has been written (or shall we say ghost-written?) by Amitabh Bachchan. On reading it, I couldn't help wishing the book's editors, De Vos & Manschot, had had the courage to exclude it. For it is trite. But I guess you don't go around rejecting something signed by his holiness, the Great *A B*.

To be fair to his holiness though, writing reflective pieces on cinema is not this actor's strong point. He is very good at his work in front of the movie camera, and that would normally be enough, were it not for his new-found academic fans. Here now are a few lines from his foreword, which stand out for honestly expressing his own puzzlement at the impact of Hindi cinema on its audience:

> Having been a part of Indian cinema for 35 years, I wonder what could be so captivating about our movies that they should attract such diverse audiences and bridge cultural and linguistic divides. There must be something divine…in our portrayals that they appreciate and we overlook. One feels overwhelmed and humbled by this universal recognition.

On the positive side, this book has a few novel essays, which make it special. A good example of that is Sudha Rajgopalan's paper on the Soviet fans of Hindi cinema. Some of the earliest foreign audiences for Indian popular cinema were, and are the Soviet people. Between 1954 and '91, dubbed Hindi films ran in packed movie halls throughout the Soviet Union. As Rajgopalan puts it:

> The popularity of these films was legendary, and the subject of both serious debate and local humour in post-Stalinist Soviet society: a letter from a moviegoer to a film journal in the 1970s proclaimed that only a yogi could possibly endure the long queues for tickets to an Indian film show at a Soviet theatre!
>
> Audience members often commented that theatres showed good, bad, and Indian films, because Indian popular cinema was perceived as a category unto itself. Clearly, it played a significant role in the Soviet popular imagination of this period.

Another observation of hers which makes interesting reading is that "the melodramatic excesses of Indian film met viewers' emotional needs." Our celluloid love stories, she adds, were especially popular in the Soviet Union until 1991because they had happy endings (!)

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Documenting The Role of An Institution

Meenakshi Thapan

WOMEN, EDUCATION AND POLITICS: THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT AND DELHI'S INDRAPRASTHA COLLEGE
By Meena Bhargava and Kalyani Dutta
Oxford University Press, Delhi, pp. 169, Rs. 450.00

This book is about the history of a women's college and about aspects of the women's movement in the nationalist period. It is also a book about dreams, aspirations and desires, among young women who sought higher education, their fathers and elders who allowed them to do so, the stalwarts at the forefront of women's education in India, both women and men, and about colonialism and its legacy, in the curriculum it bequeathed women's education, in its zeal for civilizing and modernizing the submissive and passive native. The authors provide a fascinating account of the history of Indraprastha College for Women in Delhi and take into consideration the role of colonialists, nationalists and social reformers, and the women's movement in fostering education for women in modern India. Indraprastha College was the bastion of women's education in an otherwise arid educational landscape that simply overlooked education for women. It began as a school in 1904, a fact perhaps unknown outside college walls, and was established as the first college for undergraduate education for women in 1924.

In their choice of the college as a case-study, the authors state their objective in terms of understanding the movement for women's education in India as well as the pioneering role of women in national politics. This twin objective is well realized by the authors through a systematic, and largely historical, examination of various aspects of the movement for women's education and the role of the college in shaping the relationship between women and politics. The early years of the twentieth century are of particular interest as the ideals for an education for women are drawn out by the authors. These are largely determined by a patriarchal perspective that views such an education essentially in terms of the 'virtues' essential for a 'good' woman (mother and wife) in a 'modern' India, a point made elsewhere by other scholars as well.

The authors point to the origins of the Indraprastha school, by suggesting that the founders 'must have been inspired by the pioneers of women's education and social reformers' such as Ishwara Chandra Vidyasagar, Justice Mahadev Govind Ranade, Raja Rammohun Roy, Pandita Ramabai and others (p.17). Laying the ground for inspiration in perhaps socially more acceptable indigenous sources, Bhargava and Dutta themselves clearly point to Annie Besant as the one 'who ultimately motivated and galvanized' the formation of the school. Needless to say, the pioneering efforts of Annie Besant for the promotion of women's education are undeniable although at present we may disagree with her efforts at emphasizing the significance of religious education for Indian youth and women. The authors briefly examine her contribution and emphasize her efforts to win over the confidence of the Hindus, and later the Muslims, to educate their women by using the ploy of focusing on the religious aspects of institutional education. It was undoubtedly the theosophists, who furthered the goal of educating women by laying the framework of the Indraprastha School. Bhargava and Dutta however do not comment on this unlikely alliance between theosophists, ardent nationalists, and an overwhelmingly Hindu public who together were responsible for the setting up of this institution, as described by the authors. In my view, it is a momentous coming together of vastly varying perspectives and goals for the explicit purpose of establishing an institution for women's education. Understanding the implications of the ideological underpinnings of these different approaches in their impetus for women's education would bring out the significance of the common effort and yet comment on the complexity and multiplicity of the differing objectives.

The interplay of religion, education and politics continues, the authors tell us, in the early years of the school's functioning. Political participation or commitment on the part of the school, especially the involvement of the college Principal in the Home Rule Movement, was frowned upon and stringent measures were employed by the Government to ensure conformity. This did not however deter the school's support to nationalist activities and this in turn gained them the support of prominent nationalists in the country. In the midst of all this, Indraprastha College came into being in 1924 when there appeared to be a 'stir in the world of higher education for women' (p. 42). It was in fact an unusual moment in the history of women's education as women were not yet considered worthy of higher education across the country. I would argue rather that Indraprastha College was established despite the appalling state of women's higher education, notwithstanding Aparna Basu's comment about 'an encouraging growth in women's education' in the period.

The college is remarkable, from the very beginning, in its socio-economic composition and its good mix of students from different caste and religious backgrounds. The college attracted young women from different kinds of communities because of its cosmopolitan outlook and a non-sexist curriculum on offer. It is therefore somewhat unfair to presume that Christian girls joined the college as they could not perhaps attend the boys' college at St. Stephen's (p.44). Languages, history, mathematics, economics and domestic science were critical components of the curriculum that grew with each passing year with additional grants and growing finances. Although we obtain a good idea of the curriculum in the college, and its significance at the time, there is very little in the book about its transaction. A documentation of some of the prevailing pedagogic practices would have in fact helped in a better understanding of the college as an *educational* institution. The fact that coercion in dealing with students was 'out of the question' (p. 52) is an interesting comment on pedagogic practice. What else took place in the classroom between teachers and students? How was learning engendered? What kind of tools and techniques were being used to transmit knowledge? And how did students respond and gain from pedagogic practices in the classroom and outside, through their engagement with social and political issues?

The authors attempt to provide some answers through their documentation of the political participation of young women in the changing history of India. This part of the book is a competent analysis of such participation with a particular focus on the All India Students' Federation and the Quit India Movement. The young women at Indraprastha College were articulate, determined, and committed to a 'free' India and actively participated in strikes, marches, and other dissident events marking themselves as independent voices of student participation. There is in fact much less material available to the authors for students' activism in the 1950s and 1960s and it appears to be a period marked by compliance and passivity among women and the women's movement. In the late 1970s, young women in the college are once again active in addressing various issues whether these are dowry murders, sati, women's welfare and other social issues.

Bhargava and Dutta have done a commendable job of writing a history of Indraprastha College with a focus on women's participation in political activities. The history of women's education has been documented in recent times but the specificities of how this came about, in the case of a particular institution, the inspirations and objectives, institutional problems and dilemmas, the voices of young women, their dreams and activities, all of these make for very interesting reading. This book will also serve as archival material for future generations of scholars who pass through Indraprastha College, both students and teachers, and is therefore a fine contribution.■

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A Treat for Achebe Fans

Mala Pandurang

THE CHINUA ACHEBE ENCYCLOPAEDIA
Edited by M. Keith Booker
Greenwood Press, Westport, 2003, pp. 344, $78.95

"Like one of the momentous events that one is bound to remember, like where one was when John F. Kennedy was assassinated, many of us recall where we were when we first read Achebe's (first) novel."

This volume on Chinua Achebe is part of a series of literary encyclopedias on a wide range of writers ranging from Emily Dickson to William Faulkner, to Toni Morrison. In his preface to the volume, Keith Booker acknowledges the life long role that the veteran Nigerian writer has played in the "rise of the African novel as a global cultural phenomenon" (xvii). Africanist Professor Simon Gikwandi further elaborates upon the 'transformative nature' of Achebe's creative genius in a concise foreword. Gikwandi traces the "inexorable rise of Chinua Achebe to canonical status in world literature" (i), and discusses the influence that Achebe has had on "the institutions of pedagogy and interpretation and the role of his fictions have come to play in the making and unmaking of African worlds" (x). Readers familiar with *Things Fall Apart* cannot but agree with Gikwandi's observation: "Like one of the momentous events that one is bound to remember, like where one was when John F. Kennedy was assassinated, many of us recall where we were when we first read Achebe's (first) novel."

The Chinua Achebe Encyclopaedia has several hundred alphabetically arranged entries that cumulatively offer a comprehensive overview of Achebe's contribution over the past five decades as an artist/intellectual. Achebe's entire oeuvre comprises five novels (*Things Fall Apart, Arrow of God, No Longer at Ease, A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah*), collections of short stories, and of poetry, children's fiction, and incisive critical and political commentaries References include explanations of aspects of Igbo mythology and folklore that recur in Achebe's narratives; descriptions of Igbo, Nigerian and African historical and political landscapes; interviews with Achebe that constitute an important commentary by the writer on his own work; a chronological overview of the highlights of Achebe's life; and a bibliography of recent scholarship. Equally useful are critical commentaries on the individual narratives by expert scholars in the field.

In addition to the entries that identify and explain the various characters/locations/ important concepts and issues that figure in Achebe's work, there is a variety of interesting bytes of additional information. These include references to the adaptation of Achebe's writing to the arena of popular culture. Included, for instance, is an entry on a film *Bullfrog in the Sun* directed by West German Hans Jurgen Pohland and based on both *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease.* We learn that *Achebe* reacted negatively to the very pessimistic tone of this film, which relied equally on both novels and operated on a continual shift in context from one novel to the other. The poster used for promoting showings of this 1971 adaptation of *Things Fall Apart* and his third novel *No Longer at Ease,* proclaims the film as "the most provocative love story ever filmed in Black Africa"! Equally fascinating is the serialized comic strip of *A Man of the People* which appeared three times a week in the *New Nigerian* newspaper in 1974, designed by Oke Horton. S.

Apart from discussions of the Achebe's reaction to writers like Conrad and Joyce Cary, there is also mention on Achebe's critical disapproval of the 'fashionable cosmopolitanism' of writers such as Salman Rushdie who have contributed to the " advertisement of the expatriate and exile as intrinsically desirable goals." Achebe is also critical of V.S Naipaul's depiction of Africa in *Bend in the River,* and suggests that Naipaul comes close to resembling Conrad in the denial of African humanity. On the other hand, he expresses his high esteem for R.K. Narayan as an author after his own heart. (References to these three writers appear in Achebe's collection of essays *Home and Exile.)*

The encyclopaedia does not fail to mention controversies. Under 'F 'is an entry for 'Foundations', and a suggestion that American Foundations, funded by the CIA, created Achebe's early opportunities for travel and publications. There is however an added note stating that while Achebe was prepared to take advantage of American largess, he "did not compromise himself by accepting it".

Attractively designed, with a number of graphics and photograph plates, this encyclopaedia is a treat for Achebe followers. Chinua Achebe remains today the most often taught African writer in India, and this volume will serve as a useful handbook for both beginners, and for teachers of Achebe. The volume serves a dual purpose. On the one hand, it is a useful starting point to those who have little knowledge of Achebe. On the other hand, it also has much to offer to those who are already familiar with Achebe, but now wish to explore new entry points for further exploration.■

Mala Pandurang is Head of Department of English, at Dr BMN College, Mumbai. Her most recent publication is *Chinua Achebe. An Anthology of Recent Criticism* (ed.) Pencraft International. New Delhi: 2006.

Continents of Creation —A Report

The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) organized a Literary Conference, "Continents of Creation: Legacy, Identity, Assertion," from 14 to 16 February 2006 in Delhi and at Neemrana. The Conference traced cultural and literary links between the countries of Africa and Asia. It recalled, and sought to celebrate, the spirit of the Bandung Conference, which took place in Indonesia fifty years ago.

"Continents of Creation" brought together forty-five creative writers from twenty-two countries in Africa and Asia, with Indian writers finding ample representation. The sessions commemorated the idea of unity in diversity and a belief in independent thought. The invited participants converged for discussions, readings, and conversations, exchanged views on narrative and poetic practice, on multilinguality, oral expressions, narrative forms, translations and the notions of history and identity. This multigeneric approach encouraged spontaneity and innovation, an appreciation of tradition as well as receptivity to radical and emergent trends in literature and thinking.

The subject of identity is of paramount significance to us as global citizens even as we negotiate individual and national boundaries. How do we protect ourselves, our territories, or what is ours without becoming autoarchies? How do we remain individuals without losing the universal and the inclusive? How do we continue to be global human beings without becoming unduly aggressive about territorial boundaries? These questions propel us to examine the notion of legacy. We are all clearly heirs to a civilization, legacies that are unique, which have antiquity. Yet, we are always in motion, pushing ahead to something new. Is this newness something to be afraid of, something to be avoided? Does this then force us to rethink the concept of assertion? Should we, or are we compelled to, assert our selves, our identities? Should not the idea of assertion be linked to the relevance and dignity of distinctive people in a globalized world? Can we address these issues without becoming jingoistic? "Continents of Creation" carved a space where these subjects were scrutinized. The conference did not want to fix answers, but to generate ideas and thoughts.

The conference was based upon themes that were crosscutting rather than country-specific. Through its various sessions the conference discussed a range of ideas: burdens of identity, narratives of the self, history and ethnicity, language and culture, a writer's creative process, the paradoxes of cultural asymmetry, concepts of home and homelessness, and finally, the polyphonic articulations of change. Voices, both young and old, enriched these discussions.

The two-day conference packed in eight intensive sessions, of which one focused on the inspiration behind writings. This session, "The Creative Urge," had six celebrated poets – Gulzar, Sudeep Sen and Ashok Vajpeyi from India, along with Jean Arsanayagam of Sri Lanka, Kaiser Haq of Bangladesh and Sefi Atta of Nigeria – reading out their poetry to an after-dinner audience.

The other sessions looked directly at the larger issue of identity, legacy and assertion. The opening session of the conference, "Burdens of Identity," was moderated by Pavan K. Varma, the Director General of the ICCR. Writers Nuruddin Farah of Somalia, Don Mattera from South Africa, Nawal El Saadawi of Egypt, U. R. Anantha Murthy from India and Goenawan Mohamad of Indonesia, who formed the panel, contended that one of the most dominant ideas that we need to understand in modern times is our colonial past, the colonial burden.

"Between Worlds – Narratives of the Self", moderated by Ekow Eshun, the Artistic Director of the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London had Miral El Tahawi of Egypt, Indira Goswami and K. Satchidanandan of India and Kofi Anyidoho from Ghana as the speakers. The session dealt with the experience of a fragmented and fractured "self" as well as the complexities of identity as in the case of one who lives outside his "home."

The third session, "Legacy and Assertion – History and Ethnicity, Language and Culture," was moderated by Professor Charles R. Larson who teaches at American University, USA, and had Kazuko Shiraishi from Japan, Ajeet Cour from India, Sefi Atta of Nigeria and Charles Mungoshi of Zimbabwe as speakers. The session raised questions specifically about the identities of writers and writings that are dictated largely by the norms of translation and publishing.

The second day began with an extended discussion on "Cultural Asymmetry: Perceptions and Paradoxes." The moderator, Professor Ashis Nandy, interacted with Jamal Kamal of Uzbekistan, Abdalmageed Haj Alameen of Sudan and Padma Sachdev and Vaasanthi from India. The session tried to unravel and question the relationship between cultures and individuals.

Professor Malashri Lal moderated the session on "Home, Homelessness and the Modern Predicament," sharing the platform with Sapardi Djoko Damono of Indonesia, Urvashi Butalia from India, Lindsey Collen from Mauritius and Meira Chand of Singapore. The panelists discussed ideas of location – physical, psychological, emotional – and boundaries.

"Rites of Writing" was moderated by Tarun J. Tejpal. An intense discussion around this topic was carried on by Gulzar and Namita Gokhale from India, Marjorie Evasco from the Philippines, Abhi Subedi from Nepal and Selina Hossain from Bangladesh. The discussants felt that the creative process was very much connected with the evolution of languages. The creative practice is impacted by the way language has been changing over the years.

The last session of this two-day conference, "Voices of Change" featured Feryal Ali Gauhar of Pakistan, Sonam Kinga of Bhutan, and Mallika Sengupta and Geetanjali Shree of India with Ashok Vajpeyi as the moderator. The session raised questions about the place of the writer, the spread and privilege of the English language, about how languages can be saved, the role of history, and about how literature is being appropriated by the market and the media.

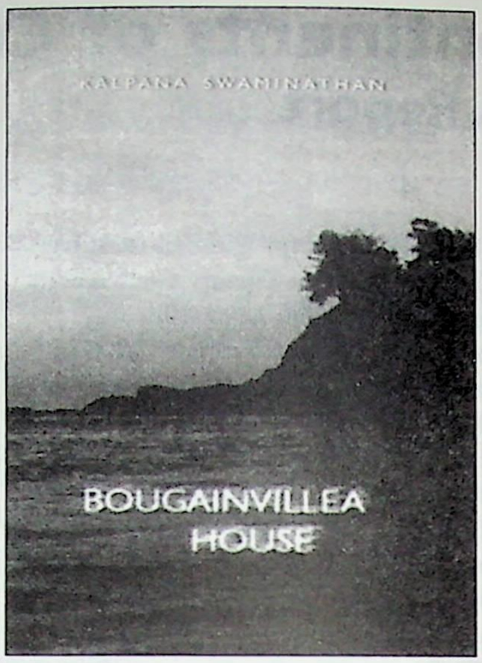
The conference highlighted many languages and many literatures, leading all participants through a process of renewals and discoveries to a reconfigured world. It is hoped that the success of this event will pave the way to an annual or biannual conference in literature. Themes and emphasis may vary, but the world of writing remains inclusive, generous and bold.■

Chandana Dutta was a member of the Organizing Committee for the Continents of Creation, the Africa Asia Literary Conference.

In An Unexplored Genre

Ira Pande

BOUGAINVILLEA HOUSE
By Kalpana Swaminathan
Penguin-Viking, Delhi, 2006, pp. 346, Rs. 395.00



Even at the height of the boom in Indian writing, it is strange how the detective novel or thriller has remained an unexplored genre. In the West, the detective novel attracted some of the best minds and eminent writers (T.S. Eliot and George Orwell, to name just two) to write brilliant essays on this genre to give it the academic respectability it so richly deserves. Yet, for some odd reason, not one of the talented writers from the subcontinent has tried to write in this most challenging genre. No great Indian sleuth, apart from Inspector Ghote, the ludicrous caricature of a Bombay cop, has yet been created.

Along comes *Bougainvillea House*, described by its publishers as a psychological drama by Kalpana Swaminathan, an author who had made a most impressive debut with *Ambrosia for Afters* a couple of years ago. Swaminathan is additionally (and impressively) a surgeon and fine critic. Given all this, one thought, here comes India's first good psychological thriller, written by someone who has proved that she has a finely tuned antenna for details and subtleties.

Swaminathan chooses the setting for this book with care: a lonely house on a promontory in Goa, draped with the eponymous vine, Bougainvillea House stands shrouded in mystery and lonely grandeur. So far, so good; for the bougainvillea has the right touch of tropical exotica for a reader looking for such splashes of colour in a dark tale of mystery and death. Those who know the plant also know that it often burrows deep into the very walls that sustain it and eventually tears them apart. So when Swaminathan sends Clarice Aranxa, who is slowly dying of a motor neuron disease, to this cleverly named house, she sets the stage for a certain air of expectancy. For by now, we also know that Clarice has cleverly engineered the (accidental?) death of her daughter's unsuitable suitor in Bombay.

Clarice may have a disease that is slowly wasting away her body and her limbs may no longer obey her, but her mind is evil and cunning. Despite her air of helpless weakness, she remains capable of making those around her obey her every command. Her daughter, her housekeeper, the doctor and the taxi driver—all seem to move on strings Clarice pulls. Up to this point, there is little to like in Clarice Aranxa: she is a petty snob with a deep contempt for native Indians, dark skins and those who do not have the genteel aristocratic background that she values above all. She is choosy about who touches her and seems frigid despite her weakness for sexy, provocative lingerie. In building up her character, Swaminathan uses the device of recall and a dramatic monologue to play games with her reader, so that we are now taken thirty years back, now moved forward until events described by Clarice become a complex web of false and real memory.

There are lyrical passages describing her dark past and the Gothic overtones of the novel become more and more pronounced as we see Clarice play out a deadly game of retribution and revenge. Like a broken melody, the deaths of both Clarice's husband Clive and his illegitimate son Justin, Clarice's doctor in Goa, are wound round a red plastic belt and involve death by drowning. There is rain, mud, dark churches, silent nuns and behind them all, is the brooding presence of a dark house where the clock was silenced for thirty-six years to muffle a secret that lies at the centre of this dark, Gothic tale.

The plot spirals around varying versions of the truth and, Swaminathan like the surgeon she is, uses the scalpel to uncover the mess that lies beneath the surface of seemingly placid and inert lives. What she creates most compellingly is the suffocating atmosphere of suppressed truths and the circumstances that propel characters to lie and live in self-deceit.

However, somewhere, Swaminathan gets so seduced by her own characters and the world that she has created that the atmospherics become more important than the pace of the plot. This crucial lapse eventually destroys the great potential that Swaminathan had available to her. The characters of Dr Khan, Marion and Pauline remain inert as Clarice soaks up too much of the writer's energy. Eventually, there is a tiredness that begins to creep over the reader as you wait for the final denouement of a plot gone seriously astray. Brave though this attempt at writing a dramatic mystery is, one wishes that Swaminathan had wielded her surgeon's skills here to carve away what is excessive and enervating. The overdose of suffocation and of Clarice's petulant and spoilt presence throws into sharp relief the weakness of such limp characters as Pauline and Marion. In trying to make Dr Khan attempt to play the healer, Swaminathan creates in him a bumbling version of a Freud and Sherlock Holmes. Clarice's retreat into silence reveals to the reader how inarticulate and pallid the rest of the cast is. When she stops talking, it is as if the very life blood of the plot is leeched away.

One must, however, compliment Swaminathan on her powerful evocation of an atmosphere of evil. When she describes the colours, moods, and the lush Goan landscape she is sure and skilful. Clarice's fetish for lacy lingerie, her fastidious distance from the devoted Pauline and her clinical detachment from the lives of her husband and children—are all sensitively and subtly drawn. One sincerely hopes that the next time Swaminthan writes, she uses her considerable skills more to tell a tale and less to paint the props.■

Ira Pande is a freelance editor.

A Remarkable Mosaic

Pamela Manasi

INTO GRANDER SPACE
By Sonjoy Dutta Roy
A Writers Workshop Redbird Book, pp. 57, Rs. 150.00

This is Dr. Sonjoy Dutta Roy's second volume of poems. If his earlier work *The Absent Words* was good, delightful poetry, the present one is more so. It is maturer, sadder, more intimate, more lyrical.

The poet who teaches at the department of English, University of Allahabad, has used myth, legend and fable, weaving them into a beautiful mosaic which give his work an epic dimension. The juxtaposition of all these with a modern day setting makes his philosophical concerns quite apparent. Where will the tortoise go after winning the race, he asks. The beautiful swan who swims alone, the spider that weaves a different, delicate web are very much like the poet or the artist who creates barricades around himself with his works of art - his defence against a hard and cruel world.

'Into Grander Space' is a long poem, with two parallel narratives. In one Vyasa speaks to Janamejaya, explaining to him the whys and wherefores of the great war and in the other a father addresses his adolescent son, trying to fathom the workings of his son's mind, and hoping to discover something about himself too, at the same time. With his half knowledge, half life, he gingerly tries to find an equation with his growing son. He sees his own past as his son's future. These parts of the poem have an intimate, conversational tone. Yet the poem has a lyrical quality about it.

The Vyasa–Janmejaya segments of the poem talk of silent battlefields and 'mahaprasthana' i.e. the ultimate exit at the end of it all. Life is a battlefield, so are our myriad relationships, it reminds us. In the parallel narrative, the father too, talks of the baggage of collected relationships and the greatest mystery of all called life. As he speaks of his son's Westward migration and then his Eastward journey, the reader is reminded of various inner and outer journeys of his own.

The father visualizes his son going to America and finding himself on a course of collision on entering the big bad world and feeling that he has entered a no man's land because of the colour of his skin, which is neither white nor black, indicative of the poet's anguish that even in this age, racial prejudices are strong. The US, he laments, 'had taken you away from yourself'. In his mind's eye, he also sees him coming back to his roots, "with a bang and crashland into an ocean of surging humanity, dirt and grime, power cuts, water shortage, telephone lines dead, and bribery galore." It's a very realistic picture of our country which to the poet, is an "abode of traditions, haunted by its grand old ghosts and it's feudal glory, refusing to change, adjust, conform." The cities are like "jungles of concrete" to the poet, where man doesn't know man. Very T.S. Eliotish !

The difference between dream and reality hits us in the face when Dutta Roy describes a poet's dream – a dream in which he reads from his latest work 'One Last Fable : The Ruru Deer', before a spell-bound audience. It is every poet's dream. In this fable the greed and lust of man are compared to the great compassion of an inmate of the jungle, the Ruru deer,

Do not strike one already stricken
ruined in this world and beyond.

If the world needs any one virtue today, it is indeed compassion for the suffering humanity, that sometimes has to pay for it's own excesses.

Vyasa's last few lines are rich in beauty as well as philosophical content. They are a gist of what the mystery of life is all about. "Wisdom lies in the quiet mind that can stay remote in contemplation, even as the world whirls in it's circuitous routes" are the sage's words of advice to a world in which the sane ones are no more than voices in the wilderness, quite like Vikarna, protesting in the game of dice, a sane voice lost amidst the clamour.

Written in verse-libre, *Into Grander Space* is a remarkable work. The smooth, flowing language and the strong imagery hold the reader captive. But it is an elitist work. Too scholarly and Eliotish once again. It is dark and gloomy too, at times. The poet dwells only one one side of the picture. Dirt and filth there is in our country, but there's advancement and growth too. We are rigid in our attitudes, but we are changing at some level at the same time, becoming more aware of the world around us with each passing day. Greed and lust afflict us no doubt, but we have the Ruru deer's compassion, too. If the West beckons us, so does the sage Vyasa. The poet himself suggests that the mind which is "a jumping monkey" "opens to a host of possibilities". Well, may be this host of possibilities will one day help us build a Utopian world, blending the two cultures — and really, really get transported to a Grander Space.■

Pamela Manasi teaches English at Delhi University and writes fiction and poetry in Hindi.

Cultural Studies

Mullah Omar and Robespierre: Essays in the Politics of Ideas by Parsa Venkateshwar Rao Jr. on some important issues and thinkers in the disciplines of politics, history, philosophy, literature and science.
Rupa & Co., New Delhi, 2005, pp. 162, Rs. 395.00

Fiction

Double Tap: The Stunning Courtroom Thriller by Steve Martin is a take-off on the most damning of all methods of killing: a 'double tap' shooting where two bullets are fired into the victim in quick succession, the trademark of an expert military assassin.
Headline, 2005, pp. 500, Rs. 200.00

The Space Between US by Thrity Umrigar is an evocative novel which vividly portrays contemporary India through the lives of two remarkable women, bound by friendship and loss, yet separated by blood and class.
HarperCollins & India Today Group, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 321, Rs. 350.00

Film Studies

Shooting Water: A Mother-Daughter Journey & The Making of A Film by Devyani Saltzman, with an Afterword by Deepa Mehta is a remarkable story of an odyssey both transformative and inspiring of the author's life-changing experiences in India, the struggle to produce a film and in the process, a deepening of a love between a mother and daughter.
Penguin, 2006, pp. 256, Rs. 295.00

Helen: The Life and Times of an H-Bomb by Jerry Pinto is a highly readable study of the phenomenon that was Helen as well as a provocative examination of middle-class Indian morality, politics of religion, gender and sexuality in popular culture, and the importance of the song and the wayward woman in Hindi cinema.
Penguin, 2006, pp. 256, Rs. 275.00

Gender Studies

Poverty, Gender and Migration edited by Sandhya Arya and Anupama Roy, volume 2 in the *Women and Migration in Asia* series, studies the new migratory flows among Asian women focusing on poverty and the attendant issues of powerlessness that mediate woman's migration.
Sage Publications, New Delhi, pp. 261, Rs. 320.00

Gender, Conflict and Migration edited by Navnita Chadha Behera, volume 3 in the *Women and Migration in Asia* series, provides key insights into the changes in status, identities and power relations among men and women as they move from a conflict situation at home to migrant camps, to the post-conflict or peace-building phase when they return home.
Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 310, Rs. 395.00

Historical Studies

Health and Society in Bengal: A Selection from late 19th Century Bengal Periodicals edited by Pradip Kumar Bose.
Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 290, Rs. 680.00

The Art of the Mussalmans in Spain by Shahid Suhrawardy covers in rich detail a period of Islamic history not accessible to most scholars of Islamic Art.
Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2005, pp. 190, Pak Rs. 495.00

The Highly Civilized Man: Richard Burton and the Victorian World by Dane Kennedy is a fresh and compelling examination of Victorian Britain's most protean figure.
Tara-India Research Press, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 354, price not stated.

Text & Practice: Essays on South Asian History by Ronald Inden with an introduction by Daud Ali present superb examples of the fruitful engagement between, and cross-fertilization of, the disciplines of history and anthropology.
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 373, Rs. 695.00

International Relations

Sino-Mongolian Relations 1949-2004 by Shakti Madhok is about a chequered relationship and a look at what the future may hold for the two neighbours.
Reliance Publishing House, 2005, pp. 246, Rs. 260 & $52

Terrorism in Southeast Asia: Implications for South Asia edited by Wilson John and Swati Parashar is a wake-up call to counter terrorism policy makers in India and elsewhere to pay more attention to Jihadi terrorism in order that linkages may be detected and neutralized in time.
Observer Research Foundation & Pearson / Longman, 2005, pp. 269, Rs. 550.00

Are Human Rights Western: A Contribution to the Dialogue of Civilizations by Arvind Sharma examines the proposition from a range of perspectives—historical, secular, economic, philosophical and religious—and goes on to the question of whether the claim regarding compensation for historical wrongs should be categorized under a human right issue.
Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2006, pp. 289, Rs. 575.00

Poetry

Terms of Seeing: New and Selected Poems by E.V. Ramakrishna evidence a deep disquiet that is a pointer to the times we live in.
Konark Publishers, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 80, Rs. 200.00

Political Studies

Confronting Saffron Demography: Religion, Fertility and Women's Status in India by Patricia Jefferey and Roger Jefferey draws on over 20 years of field research in Uttar Pradesh to challenge Hindutva myths about Muslim in India.
Three Essays Collective, Delhi, 2006, pp. 161, Rs. 200.00

Secularism, Communalism And The Intellectuals by Zaheer Baber focusses on the role of fashionable critiques and smug dismissals of secularism and modernity and the so-called indigenous traditions in providing intellectual support for the discourse of Hindutva.
Three Essays Collective, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 99, Rs. 125.00

Sociology

Crisis and Contention in Indian Society by T.K. Oommen focuses on different facets of the contentious debates about the very nature of Indian society and examines the various internal threats which are antithetical to the democratic order.
Sage Publications, Delhi, 2006, pp. 244, Rs. 320.00

Wild Life

Eye in the Jungle: Photographs and Writings by M. Krishnan is a commemorative and limited edition compiled by Ashish and Shanthi Chandola with T.N.A. Perumal.
University Press, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 128, Rs. 1500.00

The Nehrus: Personal Histories by Mushirul Hasan is a photo journey of the life and times of the Nehru family.
Roli Books, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 320, price not stated.

A Vision for South Asia*

Akmal Hussain

South Asia Can Lead the World

South Asia is at a historic moment of transforming the economic conditions of its people and playing a leadership role not only in the global economy but also in the development of human civilization in the 21st century. For the first time in the last 350 years, the global economy is undergoing a shift in its center of gravity from the continents of Europe and North America to Asia. If present trends in GDP growth in China, U.S. and India respectively continue, then in the next two decades China will be the largest economy in the world, U.S. the second largest and India the third largest economy. However, if South Asian countries develop an integrated economy, then South Asia can become the second largest economy in the world after China. Given the geographic proximity and economic complementarities between South Asia on the one hand and China on the other, this region could become the greatest economic powerhouse in human history.

Yet the world cannot be sustained by economic growth alone. Human life is threatened with the environmental crisis and conflicts arising from the culture of greed, from endemic poverty and the egotistic projection of military power. Societies in this region have a rich cultural tradition of experiencing unity through transcending the ego, of creative growth through human solidarity and a harmony with nature. In bringing these aspects of their culture to bear in facing contemporary challenges, the people of this region could bring a new consciousness and institutions to the global market mechanism. In so doing South Asia and China can together take the 21st century world on to a new trajectory of sustainable development and human security. It can be an Asian century that enriches human civilization.

South Asia and the New Paradigm of Policy

All great epochs of economic and cultural achievement are associated with an intellectual renaissance. So must it be for South Asia as it faces the prospect of a leadership role in the 21st century. Let us begin with a critical examination of the theoretical postulates that have formed the basis of economic and foreign policy of modern nation states.

The policy paradigm underlying the last three centuries of economic growth within nation states and political relations between states, has been characterized by two propositions that are rooted in conventional social science theory:

(a) Maximization of individual gains in terms of continuous increases in production and consumption, within a competitive framework ensures the maximization of social welfare at the national as well as global levels.

(b) The economic and political interests of a nation state are best achieved by translating economic gains into military power. The assumption here is that a state can enhance national welfare by initiating, or being part of an initiative for projecting hegemonic power over other states.

These propositions now need to be questioned because of the increased interdependence of people and states on each other and on the ecology within which they function.

Let us briefly critique each of these propositions to lay the basis of proposing an alternative paradigm of policy, as this region develops a leadership role in the world: (a) First, the idea that competition alone ensures an efficient outcome may not be necessarily true in all cases in view of the work by Nobel laureate economist John Nash, who proved mathematically that in some cases the equilibrium, which maximizes individual gains, could be achieved through cooperation rather than competition.

The Nash Equilibrium solution may be particularly relevant in the context of India-Pakistan relations. Consider. India, if it is to sustain its high growth rate, will require sharply increased imports of oil, gas and industrial raw materials from West and Central Asia, for which Pakistan is the most feasible conduit. Similarly India's economic growth, which has so far been based on the domestic market will in the immediate future require rapidly increasing exports for which Pakistan and other South Asian countries are an appropriate market. Thus the sustainability of India's economic growth requires close cooperation with Pakistan. Conversely, peace and cooperation with India is essential for Pakistan, if it is to achieve a GDP growth rate of 8 to 9 percent, overcome poverty and build a democracy based on a tolerant and pluralistic society. It is clear therefore that governments in India and Pakistan will need to move out of the old mindset of a zero-sum game, where gains by one side are made at the expense of the other. Now the welfare of both countries can be maximized through joint gains within a framework of cooperation rather than conflict.

The missing dimension of the relationship between competition and welfare in conventional economic theory is that of institutions. The recent work of another Nobel Prize winning economist, Douglas North has shown that if competitive markets are to lead to efficacious outcomes, then they must be based on a set of underlying institutions. He defines institutions in terms of constraints to behaviour for achieving shared objectives within an appropriate combination of incentives and disincentives. We can apply Douglas North's principle to suggest that emerging economic powers need to seek a broad framework of cooperation for the efficient functioning of a competitive global economy.

Our proposed logic of locating competitive markets within broader institutional structures of cooperation at the regional and global levels is necessitated by the integrated ecology of the planet. *Global cooperation in environmental protection, poverty reduction and defusing the flash points of social conflict and violence will become the essential underpinning of sustainable development and human security in this century.*

(b) The second proposition in conventional social science theory and political practice, that the economic welfare and political influence of a nation state can be best achieved by translating economic gains into military power is also questionable. In the new world that is now taking shape, the influence of an emerging power will be determined not by the magnitude of the destruction it can wreak on other countries but by its contribution to enhancing life in an interdependent world. Thus it is not the military muscle of a state that will be the emblem of status, but its contribution to meeting the challenge of peace, overcoming global poverty and protecting the planet from environmental disaster.

Meeting these challenges will require a deeper understanding of the processes that shape nature and human societies, as well as a deeper awareness of our inner self and our shared civilizational wellsprings. Thus, as South Asia pursues a leadership position in the global economy, it would also have to strive to reach the cutting edge of human knowledge in the natural and social sciences. At the same time it would have to bring to bear its value system rooted in the experience of humanity that is evoked in its diverse literary and philosophical traditions.

As South Asia acquires a leadership position in the global economy over the next two decades, a change is required in the policy paradigm of nation states: from competition to cooperation, from the production of new weapons as the emblem of state power to the nurturing of a new sensibility that can sustain life on earth.

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* This paper is based on the author's presentation before the Parliamentarians from South Asian countries at the SAFMA Conference on Evolving a South Asian Fraternity, Bhurban (May 16, 2005). An earlier version was serialized in the *Daily Times*, Lahore on 24, 25and 26 May 2005.

We will suggest that if sustainable development is to take place in the global economy, indeed if life itself is to survive on the planet, a new relationship will have to be sought between human beings, nature and economic growth. South Asia with its living folk tradition of pursuing human needs within the framework of human solidarity and harmony with nature may be uniquely equipped to face this challenge.

In perhaps the largest collaborative scientific effort in the world, some of the leading environmental scientists and international institutions have recently come together to conduct the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment of planet earth. The report will be published in September this year, but the preliminary results indicate an ecological crisis. The results show that over the past fifty years, humans in the process of economic growth have caused "substantial and largely irreversible loss in the diversity of life on Earth": 25% of the species living on earth have gone extinct in the last fifty years. The crisis is made even more grave by the fact that "60% of the ecosystem services that were examined in the study are being degraded.... including fresh water.... air and the regulation of regional and local climate".

The existing process of production and consumption of goods involves generating toxic gases and materials into the air, land and water systems. Since the earth's ecology has a maximum loading capacity, it is clear therefore that the present consumerist culture, patterns of economic growth, and the underlying institutional structure, cannot be sustained indefinitely into the future without undermining the life support systems of the planet. For sustaining life on earth, a new relationship will have to be sought between human beings, nature and economic growth. Thus we may be either on the threshold of ecological disaster or the construction of a new human civilization. In this situation, for South Asia to lead the world means introducing new forms of social production, new institutions and a new consciousness that can sustain life on earth.

Today the market is being apotheosized as the mythical space in which the individual can be free and yet provided with plenty by the hidden hand of the market. Yet, inherent to the capitalist accumulation process is the systematic inculcation of an insatiable desire to possess goods. The subliminal language of advertisement does not *represent* goods, but rather *fantasizes* goods such that they appear to us not in terms of their material attributes, but as magical receptacles of such qualities as beauty, efficacy and power. Thus, qualities, which we actually possess as human beings are transposed into goods, and the individual gets locked into an endless pursuit of acquisition.

The culture of consumerism, which the market systematically inculcates, is inconsistent with conserving the environment. The life support systems of our planet cannot be sustained beyond a certain limit in the levels of global output growth inspite of any foreseeable development and adoption of green technologies. As Mahatama Gandhi put it, "There is enough in the world for everybody's need but not for everybody's greed".

Contemporary market culture is marked by the atomization of society, the inculcation of greed, egotism and the estrangement of the individual from his humanity. A new more humane sensibility must form the basis of a sustainable relationship between man, nature and economic growth. Perhaps South Asia can contribute to the contemporary world by weaving from the golden threads of its folk cultures the tapestry of a 21st century sensibility.

In South Asia the interaction of diverse civilizations across millennia has brought to the surface certain fundamental features of each civilization, which while being rooted in its specific linguistic, religious and cultural *form* are essentially of a universal nature. Three characteristics of a South Asian sensibility can be articulated:

i) The *other* constitutes the essential fertilizing force for the growth of the self. The *other* when brought into a dynamic counter-position to the *self*, helps to transcend the ego and thereby enlarge the experience of the *self*. To recall the words of Shah Hussain, the Punjabi Sufi poet. "You are the woof and you are the warp, you are in every pore, says Shah Hussain Faqir, I am not, all is you".

ii) In the South Asian tradition, (whether the Muslim Sufis, or the Bhaktis or the Buddhists) there is a detachment from the *desire* for commodities, which are seen as merely *useful*. Of course the Greek philosopher Aristotle, held a similar view when he observed in his Nichomacean Ethics, that goods cannot have value since they are merely useful. It is human functioning that is of value. However, this proposition is no more part of the contemporary western culture. Unlike the West however the voice of the Sufis still echoes in contemporary South Asian folk culture: "Those who have accumulated millions, that too is mere dust." (Shah Hussain); and the Tamil poet Kambar in describing a good society says, "There was no one who did not have enough, there was no one who had more than enough."

iii) Nature in the South Asian tradition is treated not as an exploitable resource but as a reference point to our own *human* nature. Nature is the context within which we experience our connection with the eternal, and sustain economic and social life. The Bishnoi community in Rajasthan and the peasants of Bhutan still conduct their production and social life in harmony with nature, as part of their spiritual beliefs. Najam Hussain Syed, the contemporary Sufi poet of the Punjab writes, "Plant the moonlit tree in your courtyard, nurture it, and thereby remain true to the beloved."

Amidst its diversity South Asia has shared civilizational propensities of transcending the ego as a means of fulfillment, of locating the need for goods in the context of human responsibility and of harmonizing economic and social life with nature. It is this South Asian sensibility and the associated human values that could be brought to bear in building a new relationship between humans, nature and production to sustain life in the 21st century world.

South Asia can contribute to the emergence of a 21st century civilization by helping to establish a sustainable relationship between individuals, commodities and nature. We will first outline an alternative perspective on development and then indicate a set of specific policy initiatives that can be undertaken to begin the process of actualizing the great human potential of South Asia.

An Alternative Approach to Economic Development

Aristotle in his Nicomacean Ethics propounds a relationship between human beings and commodities, which seems strange to contemporary economic theory but may be vital in building a new 21st century perspective on economic development. He proposed that it is *human functioning* that gave richness to life and not commodities, which are merely useful. The Nobel laureate, economist Amartya Sen in his recent work has drawn upon Aristotle's proposition to go beyond the notion of living standards in terms of just income or goods. A.K. Sen proposes the concept of capabilities and entitlements whereby in addition to requiring certain goods and services for oneself one may also *value* one's capability to be *socially useful*. This helps to clarify that the issue of overcoming poverty is not simply 'delivering' a certain quantity of food, but also providing complementary services such as drinking water, sanitation, health care and education. Thus A.K. Sen laid the theoretical basis of what has come to be known in the literature as "human development". Sen argues that food, health care and education constitute entitlements of citizens since they are necessary for actualizing human capabilities.

It can be argued that Sen's capabilities and entitlements formulation is rooted in the premise that our *sociality* is essential to human functioning. If this indeed is the case, then could we not extend the scope of Sen's concept of entitlements to include high quality universities, hospitals, a free press, peace, human security and the entire range of political rights associated with democracy? These rights and institutions are surely necessary for human beings to fulfill the peculiarly human need to function in "a socially useful way". If we could broaden Sen's concept in this way then the measure of "standard of living" in the theory of economic development would include not just goods and services but the

whole set of social and political institutions that are necessary for what Aristotle called "human functioning".

Specific Policy Actions

A vision is efficacious to the extent that it can be concretized. This requires bringing to bear the new consciousness of South Asian cooperation to undertake five specific policy actions for our new perspective on economic development:

1.Let the people meet

Visas restrictions should be eased to allow citizens of each country of South Asia to travel freely to enjoy the natural beauty of the region, and to participate in the social and cultural events of the various countries of South Asia. Tourism alone could make a major contribution to the GDP growth of the region. It would at the same time be pro poor growth since it would generate employment and incomes for a wide range of social groups: From porters, and owners and employees of road side cafes, restaurants, hotels and transport companies. Such travel and social interaction would help in the rediscovery of the shared civilizational values of South Asia, and help build more pluralistic societies to strengthen democracy in the region.

2.South Asia Health Foundation (SAHF)

Ill health is a major trigger that pushes people into poverty and keeps productivity at a low level in South Asia. Therefore provision of high quality preventive and curative health facilities would be a strategic intervention for poverty reduction, human development and economic growth in the region. It is proposed that a South Asia Health Foundation may be instituted with the following objectives: (i) To set up district level general hospitals at the highest international standards in selected districts of each of the countries of South Asia. (ii) Each SAHF hospital would have a network of high quality basic health units and also reproductive and child health care clinics. The latter would provide pre natal and post natal care to mothers, family planning services and basic pediatric services to infants. (iii) Each SAHF hospital would initiate community-based campaigns for hygienic drinking water, sanitation, immunization and control of epidemics.

The doctors and staff of the SAHF hospitals in a particular country could be drawn from other South Asian countries to signify the commitment of South Asians to each other. The healing and humanity in these hospitals would stand as a living symbol of both the promise and fulfillment of South Asian cooperation.

3.South Asia Education Foundation

A South Asia Education Foundation may be instituted on the basis of a private-public partnership with contributions from multilateral donor agencies. The purpose of the foundation would be to establish a network of schools as well as universities at the best international standards to help develop the knowledge base to prepare South Asia for its leadership role in the new world that is taking shape. The network of universities could enable students and researchers to interact intensively across international boundaries in South Asia and create a community of scholars that could produce new knowledge in the natural and social sciences.

4. Private Sector Joint Venture Infrastructure Projects

(i) India, Pakistan and Bangladesh should cooperate closely in establishing gas pipelines in South Asia for transporting gas from Iran, Qatar and Turkmenistan and even Myanmar. Specifically the ongoing official negotiations on transporting oil and gas from Iran through Pakistan to India should be brought to an early and successful conclusion. To strengthen the mutual interdependence between India and Pakistan the recent proposal by Mr. Mani Shankar Iyer for transporting diesel fuel from Panipat to Lahore should also be taken up quickly. In the context of developing energy markets of these resources, power trading in the region calls for establishment of high voltage interconnections between the national grids of the countries of the region.

(ii) Facilitating private sector joint projects in building a network of motorways and railways at international quality standards throughout South Asia. These modern road and rail networks would connect all the major commercial centers, towns and cities of SAARC countries with each other and with the economies of Central Asia, West Asia and East Asia.

(iii) Facilitating regional and global joint venture projects for developing new ports along both the western and eastern seaboard of South Asia, and at the same time upgrading existing ports to the highest international standards.

(iv) Facilitating regional investment projects in building a network of airports, together with cold storages and warehouses that could stimulate not only tourism but also export of perishable commodities such as milk, meat, fish, fruits and vegetables.

5.Restructuring Growth for Rapid Poverty Reduction

Economic growth must not only be accelerated but restructured in such a way that its capacity to alleviate poverty is enhanced for given growth rates of GDP. In this context of achieving pro poor growth, three sets of measures can be undertaken at the country as well as the regional levels:

(i) Joint venture projects need to be undertaken to rapidly accelerate the growth of those sub sectors in agriculture and industry respectively which have relatively higher employment elasticities and which can increase the productivity and hence put more income into the hands of the poor. These sub sectors include production and regional export of high value added agricultural products such as milk, vegetables, fruits, flowers and marine fisheries.

(ii) Regional network of support institutions in the private sector can be facilitated for enabling small scale industries located in regional growth nodes, with specialized facilities such as heat treatment, forging, quality control systems and provision of skill training, credit and marketing facilities in both the country specific and regional economies.

(iii) A SAARC Fund for vocational training may be established. The purpose of this Fund would be to help establish a network of high quality vocational training institutes for the poor. Improved training in market demanded skills would enable a shift of the labour force from low skill sector to higher skill sectors and thereby increase the productivity and income earning capability of the poor. It would at the same time generate higher growth for given levels of investment by increasing factor productivity.

If South Asia is to play a leadership role in the new world that is taking shape, then it must undertake specific initiatives within a new policy paradigm for pursuing peace, overcoming poverty and protecting the life support systems of the planet. However this requires that governments move out of a mindset that regards an adversarial relationship with a neighbouring country as the emblem of patriotism, affluence of the few at the expense of the many, as the hallmark of development, individual greed as the basis of public action, and mistrust as the basis of inter state relations. We have arrived at the end of the epoch when we could hope to conduct our social, economic and political life on the basis of such a mindset.

This is a historic moment when the people of South Asia have recognized that they have a new tryst with destiny. They are affirming that their security and well-being lies not in inter-state conflict but in peace and cooperation. Let the governments hearken to the call of their people.■

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Problems and Prospects

R. Rangachari

ASIAN IRRIGATION IN TRANSITION: RESPONDING TO CHALLENGES
Edited by Ganesh P. Shivakodi
International Water Management Institute, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2005, pp 528, Rs. 850.00

Successful management of irrigation goes well beyond the management of the infrastructure, by encompassing management of human relations, institutional and organizational dimensions and irrigation policies. The recent three decades have also seen sweeping socio-economic and environmental challenges that have significant impact on irrigated agriculture and the management of irrigation systems in Asia. The new challenges relate to at least three aspects—competing needs for water, ensuring accountability and the partnership between the public, community and private sectors and reforms. A "Workshop on Asian Irrigation in Transition" held at the Asian Institute of Technology, Bangkok, in April 2002 and, the book under review is an edited selection of many of the papers presented.

The book presents the papers and the Asian experience, under the following heads: General perspectives on transition; Responses to competition for resources; Institutional reforms and new partnership; Markets and economic productivity of irrigated agriculture and synthesis and strategic responses.

Randolph Barker and Francois Molle have traced the evolution of irrigation in South and Southeast Asia since 1850, with emphasis often varying between many social and economic objectives. They feel that there has been serious lag in the implementation of appropriate institutions to deal with the new environment of water scarcity. The challenge ahead lies in reforming the existing institutions adequately and an important component of meeting future challenges will be integrated water resource management (IWRM). The problems of irrigation development also need to be addressed effectively and it is likely to take decades to establish enforceable water rights and a complementary set of institutions associated with IWRM.

Norman P. Uphoff says that the relationships between social capital and improved irrigation management are multiple, but these still remain mostly unexamined in systemic terms. He urges that better attention must be paid to social capital needed to manage and sustain irrigation systems in the future. He cites the case of Gal Oya scheme in Sri Lanka, which he thinks could be relevant in this context. In his view, Asian countries must figure out how to multiply agricultural production in the coming decades with less land and water per capita available.

Nirmal Sengupta explores the barriers to change. He complains that private initiative is not permitted in water resource development in river valley areas, suitable for canal irrigation and that the planning and development there is left to government agencies. Moreover, he feels that options are considered only at the investigation stage of the projects by a few officials. He points out that management responsibility is often being transferred to local user groups without addressing the property rights issues or the access to information necessary for responsible governance.

There are many papers in the form of case studies from some Asian nations. Instances of specific experiences gained from schemes undertaken in Nepal, Philippines, Thailand, China, Indonesia, Taiwan and Vietnam are such examples. Of the two papers relating to Indian schemes one by Viswa Ballabh, Professor at the Institute for Rural Management, Anand on the "emerging water crisis and political economy of Irrigation reforms in India and the second by Sivamohan and Christopher Scott of the International Water management Institute reflects on reforms in Andhra Pradesh on participatory water management based on a research by IWMI funded by the Asian Development Bank.

Though India accounts for a significant part of Asian irrigation, there are no papers in this book presented by any from the irrigation or water resource management departments of the state governments of India or from the Central agencies (such as the Central Water Commission or the Planning Commission) dealing with irrigation and water resources management. Presumably, none from these institutions were present at the workshop that formed the basis of the book. More regrettable is the fact that the workshop did not take note of some of the Indian experiences and reviews that exist on issues closely related to the topics considered. For instance, the Central Water Commission, with the assistance of USAID, initiated in 1991 a comprehensive study of the various issues in improved irrigation management. An important outcome thereof was the detailed report by the Central Water Commission— "An approach to organizational and procedural changes in irrigation sector" that came out in 1992. Specific detailed studies of the states of Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh were also made in that context. The Planning Commission of India has also brought out many publications of relevance. Most of these studies have not been referred to in this book and hence limits its usefulness in the Indian context.

However, the book marks an important contribution to the broad picture of the problems and prospects of irrigation management in Asia. Many of the comments and suggestions made are relevant for India, as well. Some general reviews of irrigation sector in the Asian context are extremely well researched and are of great relevance. The paper by Douglas Vermillion, for instance, makes an excellent review of some cases of reforms undertaken recently. He contrasts the old paradigm of participatory management with the new one of "empowerment with accountability". In this context he has ably examined the reform undertaken in Andhra Pradesh after the Andhra Pradesh Farmer managed irrigation systems Act of 1997 and the lessons learnt.

The final chapter by Douglas L.Vermillion, Elinor Ostrom and Robert Yoder, depicting the future challenges facing Asian irrigation is also a well-written summary. It is useful to conclude this review by briefly recalling the salient points brought out in the 1992 CWC Report referred to earlier that set out India's vast experiences gained from operating the irrigation systems in the States and the approaches considered necessary now to improve and reorient irrigation management.

The CWC Report had brought out that in spite of the dynamic transformation of agricultural technology, public administration of the irrigation sector in India has remained rooted in a governmental structure, which had not kept pace with the changing character and complexities of irrigated agriculture. It identified the primary issues that needed to be focused upon and emphasized that adequate irrigation system reliability was a major factor in ensuring productivity. The importance of proper maintenance was also stressed.

The linkages between the agencies involved in irrigated agriculture were loose and they carried on their activities independently of each other and with the least involvement of the farmers in the decision-making. There should be a more holistic approach to irrigation management. There is a need to instill the right management culture within irrigation departments, which would integrate the multidisciplinary talents. There should be greater transparency and accountability. There is great need to ensure participatory management of irrigation systems. There should also be effective interaction between the service agencies and the water users' associations. To provide the requisite legal base and framework for the irrigation management restructuring envisaged in the National water Policy, the legal codes in the various states, statutes and orders should be reviewed and modified, as needed. The irrigation departments need restructuring on a functional basis and they should have proper staff development and performance appraisal policies. The annual revenues collected are even less than the working expenses and the gap is widening. Rational water pricing is called for. Most important of all, reform depends on political will and strong commitment brought to bear upon governmental policies and decisions.

It is not at all surprising that all these recommendations continue to be valid even now.■

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Nature, Politics and Conservation

Susan Visvanathan

ECOLOGICAL NATIONALISMS: NATURE, LIVELIHOODS AND IDENTITIES IN SOUTH ASIA
Edited by Gunnel Cederlof and K. Sivaramakrishnan
Permanent Black, Delhi, 2005, pp. 400, Rs. 750.00

This is an interesting and valuable book, though the choice of the word nationalism seems a little loose. I suspect the word "nationalisms" for a decade and more, has had such currency, that people are unwilling to let go of it, even though globalization has undercut the view on nationalism more severely than one had imagined.

Kathleen Morrison analyses the relationship between the tribals as foragers and the spice trade for the Western Ghats. This becomes an enquiry into the relationship of entrepot cities as centers of consumption and export. Historical records show the increase in the consumption of pepper in the 16th century as doubling. Pepper production is presumed to have jumped 200 to 275 percent according to the Indian authors she consults. In a foot-note on Ralph Fitch (the English traveller to Cochin in 1589) she quotes him, "Heere groweth the pepper; and it springeth up by a tree or a pole, and is like our ivy berry…..much of it doth grow in the fields among the bushes without any labour, and when it is ripe they go and gather it…" She shows us that foragers of wild pepper and cardamom, who had an important part to play in the networking of agents and traders in ancient times, would begin to diminish in importance with the kind of cultivation that Fitch describes. We also know that with the kind of crash that Dilip Menon describes for the period after the First and Second World Wars, the pepper trade would be substituted by other cash crops like cocoa and rubber and vanilla, but they would never have the magical stature that pepper brought to the West Coast of south India.

Cederlof's essay on the Toda Tiger is a significant piece on colonialism and ownership of land. Quite often Indians are known to say that "Thank God the British did not feel comfortable enough in India to buy land!" and this essay looks at the Nilgiris where the Todas entered into complex and disturbing confrontations with the British. The Todas were conveniently described as migratory and poor. With (British) "civilization", they would "receive knowledge, clothing, and better supplies, in the place of ignorance, nakedness and discomfort." By communicating that they were an unsettled people, they were denied proprietary rights by the British. When they refused to succumb to British law, having laws of their own, they were treated as "wild" and unruly. Not surprisingly, they thought the Indian government to be similar in its attitude, and one man actually produced a coin with Indira Gandhi's head as co-equivalent to Queen Victoria's, while describing colonial imposition!

Urs Geiser discusses the North West Frontier province of Pakistan, where forest bureaucracy is rendered in practice insignificant and weak. While there is a colonial legacy, and the institutional mechanisms are strong, it is contested by the resistance of people, in the name of local nationalisms. In India, when a tiger poacher is caught, he says, "It is our tradition to kill tigers" or something equally unconstitutional. The deadlock between personal interests and public interest is sharply brought out by Geiser's data. "At field level, the discourses and ideologies of the bureaucracy often give 'room for manoevre' and allow flexible interpretations in the light of local conditions and personal needs." In India, we often find utmost laxity between ideologies and actual practice. Television documentaries have shown state personnel involved in profit making ventures with regard to felling of and sale of timber.

Vinita Damodaran looks at the role of landlords in the exploitation of tribals and forest produce in Chotanagpur. In contrast, she describes the festivals of the sacred groves, which involves an understanding of people, landscapes and legends. She records, with brevity, the Jharkhand movement and the revival of rituals of the sacred grove which began to take on a festive and political hue. How ecology and environmentalism interweave in complex ways is the subject of her essay which looks at the history of people's movements in these areas. She looks at the resistance of the adivasis to those events where contractors, politicians and state officials have collaborated, "the extreme reaction of local communities to these excesses by the state and timber contactors was thus to be expected. Often their reactions caused a further denudation of the forest cover."

Antje Linkenbach reads the case of nature and politics for Uttrakhand in the hair splitting manner that anthropologists welcome, showing the differences in community in the hills. She discusses how local inhabitants view these differences, "where the history of deprivation has to be supplemented by a history of protest" and in this, the Chipko movement receives special attention, as does the assertion of political autonomy. She uses the axes of ecology, forest rights and citizenship, which is the fulcrum of the book in general. Thus rituals, place, roles and duties and privileges come under a general discussion of the pahri way of life. The political implications of religiosity are suggested if not explored, as is the relationship between ideas and their consequences.

Bengt Karlsson deals with the complex issues of tribal traditions and the survival of land rights. He says traditional rights and obligations have to be seen in the light of the past and how this affects the present, if we are to understand the several battles against the Indian state by its people in the North East. He quotes Paul Lyngdoh who claims that there are twenty-five Khasi native states who never completely merged with the Indian state apparatus, and that " it is claimed, formally and legally never joined the Indian union. Rather than in the present system of district councils Lyngdoh puts his hope in a remodeled and modernized form of the traditional governing bodies among the Khasis."

The viability of shifting cultivation and sacred groves among the Khasis is discussed. However, the flip side of the story is modernization and consumerism of native people (whether they be indigenous or not) and the gradual loss of forest cover.

Claude Garcia and J.P Pascal continue the discussion on sacred forests, this time in Kodagu. Colonial forest policy was very interested in medicine as a link between commerce and forest produce. The authors suggest that this is true of Indian scientists. They move on to the discussion of sacred forests as socially significant places of interaction between humans and nature. In the Annamalais, in the summer of 2005, my daughters and I visited the Gingee fort. There was on the way up the hill, a shrine to a forest goddess, which most people passed with a cursory glance. We stopped to look in. The ASI attendant asked us if we could like to make a perambulation, which we did. We saw behind the temple, on the rock face, hidden from pedestrian view, ancient drawings of Shakti. When we left the site, the attendant gave us leaves from a bush nearby, saying that this plant saved people from malaria. At the Venkatraman temple on the outskirts of the fort, a similar episode occurred where the ASI guide opened the locked temple, then while we stood before one of the doors he shut his eyes and sang an invocatory hymn to the god and goddess. It went on for so long, we got worried, wondering whether we would be released from his devotion and when he would return to his duties as gate-keeper to the state. He did, and proceeded to tell us about Muslim invasions and present day incursions by film directors who used the temple as cinematic backdrop. Jyothindra Jain has confirmed that as museum curator he has often experienced visitors leaving gifts for the gods who are represented in the sculptures exhibited, The interesting play between the secular and the religious is always evident wherever one goes in India. In Kodagu, Devarakadus are used as political tools which focus on the "lack of concern of the state government and mismanagement of the forest department". The real question lying below the surface of this book is a theoretical formulation, a Kafkaesque one, (pointed out to me by Ravi Nandan Singh a JNU scholar,) as to "Who are the gatekeepers in any society?".

Gotz Hoeppe looks at fishers in Chamakkala, Kerala, which has a

predominantly Hindu Araya community. His data however sounds very similar to that which has been chronicled by earlier writers on the fishing struggle. Therefore, it would be interesting for newer writers in the field to chronicle the differences between fishers of different religious groups, with the rise of fundamentalism. His discussion of the whereabouts of oil sardines is extremely significant, since "mathi" is at the heart of dietary significance in Kerala, given the economic status of Gulf returnees and their ability to buy other varieties of fish at astonishing prices. However, the author does not seem to have met those in the Fish Workers Movement in Kerala who would communicate how significant the battle lines have been with regard to ecological concerns, and these do overarch sectarian interest. While we may be university intellectuals, the fishers have an intelligentsia who network with state bureaucrats and politicians, and I have always found it worthwhile accessing their archives of newspaper cuttings and reports and writings. Their web-sites are extremely well maintained, and all researchers draw on these now as legitimate sources.

Wolfgang Mey discusses colonial policy with regard to the Chittagong hill tracts of Bangladesh, and tensions arising from these. Migration, structural changes, border defense, tea plantations with it's hierarchies and modes of tax collection are discussed. So also the colonial distaste for shifting cultivation and the endeavour to 'civilise' wild peoples living in nature are described. The author shows how East Pakistan continued this policy. Building of dams in the '60s economy, had its implications. About 40,000 people were forced to migrate to India as the water flooded their land. It was an attempt by the state to continue the policy of assimilating tribals and peasants into modernism by displacing them or annihilating them by poverty. The Bangladesh government also continued a repressive policy against tribals and peasants of Chittagong. "A large number of massacres forced about 60,000 to 70,000 people to take refuge in neighbouring India." The concern for indigenous people in the 21st century comes from the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. It would be interesting to question, as Mey does, the various links between elites in a developing country and the questions raised by modernism and it's profiteers.

Sarah Southwold-Llewellyn discusses conflicts arising from forest management in a Pukhtun community in Pakistan's Hindu Kush mountains. She describes the different languages used by key actors and the variability of their discourse dependent upon the contests of convenience. She calls these "inconsistencies in the application of the law". The concept approximates the linguistic notion of "parole" or even, in a more extreme sense, Pierre Bourdieu use of "strategies and lies" and how they function in the real world. Some of the articulations of actors in the field, provide almost a sense of light relief in what is otherwise a scholarly and carefully honed essay about people who must survive a bitter winter, and for whom firewood must mean more than what any of us can ever imagine.

Nina Bhatt analyses the bureaucracy in game parks in Nepal. Here, too everyday constraints such as obsequiousness and boredom, the desire for power and responsibility, the opposition between NGOs and government employees is discussed with some literary abandon, which makes postmodern writing such a tactile endeavour, as old as Clifford Geertz's idea of thick description. She also compares Park bureaucracy with Forest officials, showing us the impact of globalization through conservation policy, development aid and tourism. Foresters seen through the eyes of Park employees are money loving rather than ecological and spiritual.

In conclusion, an interesting book for lay and specialized readers, and readers will perhaps begin to imagine that all those jet-setting academia, moving like migratory birds during seminar seasons, are well served by series editors who bring the debates to us in print.■

Susan Visvanathan is the editor of *Structure and Transformation*, (OUP 2000) a handbook of readings on tradition and contemporary social structure and relations. Her other publications include *Christians of Kerala* (OUP, 1993) and *An Ethnography of Mysticism* (Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Shimla 1998) She is at the Centre for the Study of Social Systems, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, where she teaches Classical Sociological Theory, Gender Studies, Historical Method in Sociology. As a writer of feminist fiction she has tended to be subversive, making the novella her chosen genre.

Mirroring Social Realities

Shakti Kak

MUSLIMS IN INDIAN ECONOMY
By Omar Khalidi
Three Essays Collective, India, 2006, pp. 240, Rs. 575.00

Some of the questions that Omar Khalidi has raised in his latest book relate to the economic condition of Muslims in India in the beginning of the new millennium. He compares their present condition with the not so distant past. He then goes on to document the record of colonial and post colonial policies vis-à-vis Muslims and their economic profile as compared with the majority community and other minority communities. He provides statistical evidence obtained from archival and contemporary records, interviews with policy makers, politicians and journalists to arrive at conclusions. Omar Khalidi has been asking uncomfortable but relevant questions about the status—social and economic—of Muslims in democratic India. The book under review is a follow up on his earlier book *'Khaki and the Ethnic Violence in India—Army, Police and Paramilitary Forces during Communal Riots* which dealt with the low representation of Muslims in the armed forces and paramilitary forces.

The writer provides archival data to indicate the status of the Muslim community during the colonial period. Due to their reluctance in joining the British educational system, Muslims lagged behind in government employment. 'As a result, on October 12, 1887, there were twelve Indians in the ICS, all Hindus' (p. 29) Though in subsequent years, this was sought to be rectified by spreading literacy by the community leaders and the colonial administration. In spite of these efforts, the ICS had only 10.79 percent Muslims in 1947. It was a different picture as far as the Indian Army was concerned. At the time of Partition, Muslims constituted 30-36 percent of the Indian Army.[1] The colonial policies of land settlement and the existence of small principalities in various regions of India had a differential impact on the Muslim community. The book brings out the specificities of Muslims in India from the trade enclaves of the western coast to their arrival as conquerors confined to military, bureaucracy and traditional education. The writer concludes that 'the pattern of economic stratification among Muslims—a community of miniscule numbers in trade, slightly larger numbers in military and bureaucracy, larger numbers of artisans, and the largest numbers of landless peasants— continues into our own times' (p.223). Khalidi brings to light a number of adverse policy measures that were taken and general prejudices that Muslims in India had to put up with after Independence.

The book primarily deals with the post-Independence (post- Partition) policies that reflect upon the condition of the community in contemporary times. The feeling of mistrust and the hardships faced by Muslims after Partition have been accentuated by the real and perceived discrimination in jobs in the army, police, public sector and other organized public and private businesses. A verse by Altaf Hussain Hali, quoted in the book, written in the context of worsening economic conditions among Muslims after 1857 when the British distrusted them, describes largely the condition of Muslims today.

We are not trusted by the government
Nor are we among the prominent courtiers of the ruler
Neither are we among the educated elite
We have no share in trade or the industry
Nor do you find us in the civil services
Or in the business

The book primarily deals with the post-Independence (post-Partition) policies that reflect upon the condition of the community in contemporary times. The feeling of mistrust and the hardships faced by Muslims after Partition have been accentuated by the real and perceived discrimination in jobs in the army, police, public sector and other organized public and private businesses.

The harsh consequences of the recruitment policies in public services, the enactment of Evacuee Property Act and the Enemy Property Act should put to rest the famous 'appeasement of Muslims' theory as propounded by the Hindutva brigade. In reply to a query by Nehru in 1953, Mahabir Tyagi, the Defence Minister stated that the percentage of Muslims in the armed forces had fallen to 2 percent.[2] Sardar Patel as Home Minister removed Muslim officials who had opted to stay in India in 1947 (p. 39). The writer provides further evidence about the adverse and negative comments on the issue of refuge/assistance provided by Maulana Azad 'to a few frightened Muslim' officials in his ministry of education. 'Patel branded his colleague's [Maulana Azad's] ministry "a miniature Pakistan" …. . Men in state authority would look askance at those staying behind and those seeking employment were told to go to Pakistan (p. 39)'. Another irritant was the Evacuee Property Act passed after Independence, and implemented in all parts of the country. The harsh Act was implemented ruthlessly by the Minister of Rehabilitation, Mohan Lal Saxena and subsequently by N.B. Gadgil under which shops owned by Muslims in Delhi and U.P. were ordered to be sealed. 'The laws were directed not merely against powerless shopkeepers of Delhi, even properties belonging to Muslims of impeccable credentials such as the freedom fighter Mukhtar Ahmad Ansari, educator K.G. Sayidain and filmmaker K.A.Abbas were seized' (p.52). The Evacuee Property Act was replaced by the Enemy Property Act after the war with Pakistan in 1965 and is still in force.

The bias against the employment of Muslims was reinforced by missives by Sardar Patel to the UP government (led by G.B. Pant of Congress) 'to stop employing Muslims until the Muslim employment percentage is reduced to the community's population percentage….. Pant informed Vallabhbhai Patel on 28 May 1947 that "According to the present practice and rule, 60 percent of the posts are reserved for Hindus, 30 for Muslims and 10 for others"' (p.97) The U.P. Hindu Mahasabha demanded that 'armed police and home guards be manned exclusively by Hindus, that key posts in government be removed from Muslim control and given to Hindus'. In his reply to the Mahasabha, Pant reassured that 'Recruitment of different communities will be on the basis of population' (p.98). In 1954 Jawaharlal Nehru and later in early 1960s, Badruddin Tyabji, the Vice Chancellor of Aligarh Muslim University talked about the 'deep sense of frustration' and 'profound feeling of despondency and defeatism' amongst Muslims due to the perception that 'the services are not really open to them … whether defense, police or civil' (p.40). The absence of Muslim workers in the private industrial companies have also been studied by a number of scholars. The anti-Muslim statements of leading industrialists like V.H.Dalmia and Ramnath Goenka are illustrations of their bias (p. 204).

The book has separately studied states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Delhi and Andhra Pradesh to analyse the contemporary issues facing the Muslim community in these states. Regional variations occur in the occupational characteristics of the community due to historical and political factors. In the Deccan, the changes experienced by Muslims vary from the loss of land due to the Abolition of Zamindari Act to the large number of deaths as a result of

the surrender of Hyderabad and dismissal of several thousands from employment. In Andhra Pradesh, 55% Muslims live in rural areas and in Rayalseema, most of them are landless labourers. The Muslim population in Bihar is predominantly rural and is engaged in agriculture and related activities. Out of the total rural Muslim population in Bihar, larger proportion is landless and several sociological studies show 'rural communities in utter poverty and illiteracy in a state known for its backwardness as a whole' (p. 123). It has been observed by the State Minority Commission of Karnataka that there is an inverse relationship between higher posts and Muslims (p.187). The artisanal population of Uttar Pradesh is feeling the brunt of decline in demand for their products. This is worsened by frequent attacks by the votaries of Hindutva on small businesses if they are successful. A socio-economic profile of Delhi Muslims indicates a high proportion of poverty ridden and slum dwelling population.

The book contains details about various positive measures that have been taken by various governments and the policies of reservations implemented by some states since Independence. There are references to successful business enterprises that have managed to survive in the face of bias and riots. The relative prosperity among some sections of the community is at times linked with the onset of Green Revolution, employment in the Gulf countries and the few instances of positive public policies when implemented earnestly. However, the belligerence and anti-Muslim rhetoric and practices of the Hindutva forces have negated some of these developments and has forced a large segment of the community to live in an unstable atmosphere. In this context, the recent books written by Omar Khalidi provide a mirror/looking glass to the realities of Indian society.■

Reference

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Challenges of a Global Economy

Saman Kelegama

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IN A KNOWLEDGE-BASED SOCIETY: SRI LANKAN SCENE
Edited by A.D.V. de S. Indraratna
Sri Lanka Economic Association (SLEA), 2004, pp.263, price not stated.

The book is the outcome of the proceedings of the Annual Sessions of the SLEA in mid-2004 and includes 10 Chapters, which are divided into six Parts. Each Part links Human Development to a specific area of economic progress, *viz.*, poverty, growth, services (financial), education and health, technology and productivity, and competitiveness.

In the first chapter on Human Development and Poverty the editor presents a critique of the Human Development Index (HDI) (used by UN Human Development Reports), using Sri Lankan data on HDI and poverty to show that high HDI does not necessarily mean that poverty has reduced. He goes on to show that combating poverty needs specific policies such as rural development centred around agriculture, promotion of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and that this is the most effective way to enhance human development, which in turn, will lead to greater employability and productivity.

Rehman Sobhan in his essay shows that addressing poverty needs a totally different new approach from the conventional wisdom. He bases his argument on the failures of the Bretton Woods Institutions led structural adjustment packages (and later Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers [PRSPs]) to effectively alleviate poverty. He argues that structural injustice in distributing productive assets, marketing, human development programmes, and governance remains the major source of poverty and exclusion. It is not by programmes that target the poor that poverty could be eradicated, says the author, but by democratizing development by directly integrating the poor to the growth process. After providing a comprehensive critique of PRSPs, Sobhan presents a new programme to eradicate poverty and calls for a new-generation of pro-poor structural reforms.

Nimal Sanderatne examines the Growth-Human Development debate in chapter three and argues that both are needed for enhancement of each other. High growth alone cannot enhance Human Development as shown in some Middle East Countries and during the early years of economic liberalization in Sri Lanka. Growth is only a means to achieving an end, *i.e.*, human development. The author argues that in Sri Lanka, it was not high achievements in human development but wrong policies and external shocks that contributed to low growth. In any case, the author argues that growth has to be sustainable if it is to make a contribution to enhance human development and the quality of growth matters, as the 1996 UN Human Development Report has cogently articulated. Sri Lanka's recent pattern of growth with increasing inequality underscores the need for more broad-based and sustainable growth.

Thenuwara, in chapter four, addresses the importance of the delivery of financial services to alleviate poverty and enhance human development. While the shift of the resources from surplus sectors to deficit sectors could bring financial services closer to the poor, for them to reach grassroots levels some innovation in financial delivery is necessary. This is because there is a low demand due to the low purchasing power of the poor and this discourages supply of financial services by the private sector. Moreover, the well known problems of moral hazards and adverse

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selection further discourage generous allocation of financial services to the poor. It is in this context that innovative schemes such as micro-credit programmes, Grameen Model based lending, etc., becomes important and the author argues that they have to go hand-in-hand with other pro-poor delivery services to make an effective impact on reducing poverty.

Swarna Jayaweera argues that the multi-dimensions of Human Development indicate that the interface of education with political, economic and socio-cultural environment is crucial to the success of education as an agent of total development process and presents a six-point programme on education reform. The challenge in the area of human development is to provide employment-oriented training in two tiers of vocational institutions distributed equitably in districts, i.e., (1) between general education and employment, and (2) between University education and employment. It is argued that career guidance counselors should work in close association with district training centres and national education bodies to meet the challenge.

Daya Samarasinghe makes a case for health sector reforms as being necessary with emerging new problems and increase in demand for health service with technology, social, demographic and global changes. The post-1977 health reforms attempts of 1980, 1993, 1997, and 2003 have not been very successful due to inadequate consultation with stakeholders and inadequate public and parliamentary debates. Samarasinghe argues that for reforms to be successful: (a) recommendations should be prioritized and implementation plans should be well developed; (b) timing of implementation should preferably be in the early years of a government in office; (c) reformists should be well organized and market the reforms through active public debate; and (d) the political leadership should strongly support reform. Samarasinghe concludes by stating that all is not lost. Some reforms appear to be successful to the extent of having a snowballing effect, others are being implemented but need close monitoring and fine-tuning while some others are on the drawing board subject to critical analysis.

Development of Information Communication Technology (ICT) to assist the poor is the theme of the essay by V.K. Samaranayake. The author highlights some of the existing ICT programmes such as JobNet, Cyber Trade, Sri Lanka Bureau for Foreign Employment Website, Govi Sahanaya Programme and Multi-Purpose Tele Centre (Sarvodaya), to assist the lower-middle class and poor people. However, the author argues that these programmes function in an isolated manner and do not follow an integrated national effort and are therefore inadequate to meet the challenges of poverty. The author identifies governance, education, health, and agriculture, as the four areas where ICT can help poverty alleviation and some of the innovative international practices (based on the Petersburg Prize) in these areas are highlighted. The author argues that a number of ICT issues which fall within many Ministries have to be resolved before introducing an integrated approach where the provision of information and services could help people to overcome poverty.

Sunil Chandrasiri's is the only paper in the book which uses an econometric model. Here, a simultaneous equation model is used to find the link between technology and productivity in Sri Lanka. The model overcomes the shortcomings of the previous studies on the subject matter and uses the Structure-Conduct-Performance framework used in Industrial Organization theory. The findings do not show technology as a determinant of productivity (measured in relative terms), but industrial concentration is found to be an important determinant of productivity and this result clearly does not support the traditional Schumpeterian argument.

Mahendra Amarasuriya's paper shows the inadequacy of the Porter's (1990) Competitive Diamond framework in determining the competitive advantage of a nation in the modern day world where Knowledge-Management techniques in firms have progressed to unprecedented levels. Competitive strength today depends on speed, agility, managing knowledge-flow and all large global companies have formal knowledge-management programmes. In Sri Lanka, only one or two corporates have such programmes and many companies are not 'Knowledge-Ready' to face competition in a knowledge-based global market. While highlighting the need for firm level innovation, he points out that the government has to play a facilitating role for the private sector to exploit knowledge-based techniques for the advantage of Sri Lanka.

The final essay by Anura Ekanayake is on Competition, Industry and Consumer. Ekanayake shows the advantages of trade liberalization; however, he cautions that if trade liberalization is not accompanied by a corresponding liberalization of factor markets (land, labour, and capital), development of infrastructure and promoting a competitive environment, the survival of domestic industries will be under threat and lead to job losses. Such a scenario can strengthen lobbies to reverse the trade liberalization process; thus it is important to sequence the trade liberalization to bring minimum disadvantage to domestic industry and maximum benefit to the consumer.

After the *Human Resources Development Review 1992/93* (Human Resources Development Council, 1994) and the *National Human Development Report: Sri Lanka* (UNDP, 1998) there has not been a comprehensive report on Human Development in Sri Lanka. In addition to giving an up-to-date account on Human Development, the report brings in the new Knowledge-based dimension and in that sense it is an important contribution and fills in an existing void in the existing local literature on the subject.

The book gives a clear message, *i.e.*, Sri Lanka can no longer sit on her laurels of achieving high HDIs to face the future challenges of the global economy. There is a long way to go for Sri Lanka to be Knowledge-Ready and the policy apparatus should be well geared to face the challenge.■

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Communication

The readers of Rosinka Chaudhuri's review of the anthology I edited *Early Indian Poetry in English* (TBR, Vol. XXX No. 3, March 2006) could be forgiven for thinking that the book is yet another collection of poems written in Bengal. The reviewer does not mention even by name any of the poets writing in the period who have been anthologized for the very first time. (Joseph Furtado has been anthologized and is not in that sense a "new" poet). The point of the collection was to draw attention to work done outside Bengal, though the poets writing in Bengal have of course been included.

Eunice de Souza

The Process of Islamization

I.N. Mukherji

ISLAM AND THE ECONOMY OF PAKISTAN: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF TRADITIONAL INTERPRETATION
By Izzud-Din Pal
Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. xv + 159, Rs. 395.00

The focus of this book is on the prefix 'Islamic' as stated in the Constitution of Pakistan. It enjoins that the legal, social and economic framework of the country be brought into conformity with Islam.

The author believes that in Pakistan it was Abul A' la Maudoodi who actively participated in the constitutional developments which took place during the 1950s. He refers to this process as 'Islamicization'. He considers this term preferable to 'Islamization', which is a direct derivative of the name of the religion 'and ignores the variety of interpretations that may be pushed under its purview' (p.x). Subsequently however the author takes the position that the 'Islamicization' process started during the rule of Ziaul Haq (1977-88), which leaves us in doubt as to the genesis of this process.

The author believes that 'Islamicization' process is still very much ntact and an important constituent of the legal system in Pakistan. Nevertheless not all the targets established under this process have met with the expected degree of success. For instance, in the financial sector of the economy, conventional banking and the modern tools of finance continue to dominate the scene. Further the issue of *Zakat,* being another aspect of Ziaul Haq's Islamic reforms, has gone through uneven progress. There is also renewed awareness that official bodies such as Council of Islamic Ideology and the Shariat Courts are not fully representative of all the major viewpoints concerning the interpretation of Quran, the *Hadith,* and Islamic jurisprudence. A recent court judgment on interest free financing has been postponed for further review and compulsory collection of *Zakat* has been successfully challenged legally.

The author maintains that Islam as an ideology is defined in relation to traditionalist's Islam and with reference to Islamic jurisprudence developed during second-fourth centuries of Islamic history, which the *ulema* offer as an alternative to all other economic systems. This has proved an unworkable system. In the author's conception, Islam is a religion based on revealed message. It is not an ideology. It can and does accommodate people and groups with different ideologies. There are many alternative ways in which Muslim scholars interpret the Quran and the Hadith. The attempt to equate Islam with ideology therefore is to suggest that only a specific point of view held by some people (*ulema*) who make such a claim, offers the exclusive and final truth about Islam.

Similarly, according to the author, a state is an expression of how people wish to govern themselves. Islam is a universal religion and cuts across geographical boundaries but it nevertheless accommodates nuanced regional and local differences. 'The Constitution of Pakistan defines the country as an Islamic state. It would be a major leap to call it an ideological state' (p.136). The Islamic ideologues would not share this position. For them, ideology is a system based on a specific interpretation of Islam.

Referring to the role of education, the author laments that *dini madaris (*read *madrasas)* have multiplied in numbers since the 1970s. Their curriculum usually emphasizes mainly the basic knowledge of Islam. With regard to the public school system, it seems that the problem is not only that such schools are thinly scattered in the country, but also that they use curricula and textbooks which are designed to forge a new national identity based on the 'ideology of Pakistan'. The latest report compiled by A.H.Nayer and Ahmed Salim (2003) indicates that the subtle subversion in the name of Islam has continued unabated. 'The school textbooks contain historical falsehoods and inaccuracies, glorification of war and military forces, gender bias, as well as insensitivity to the religious diversity of the nation'(p.138).

Pal takes the view that the Islamic system, as advocated by the traditionalists, may not necessarily be in conflict with the type of economic liberalism as sponsored by the international financial institutions (IFIs). An obvious exception to this is the issue of *riba* (usury) in the financial system. Some modernists however, tend to emphasize that Islam's mission can be fulfilled only by establishing an Islamic welfare state, based on socialist principles.

The author is convinced that the country will have to take necessary steps to move to the path of liberal democracy and not wait for the 'catch up process' i.e. from economic liberalization towards this goal. With reference to Pakistan, the author points to the imperative of the primacy of the political institutions with a viable system of fair and free elections. 'It will be a system in which the military will return to their barracks and will have no business keeping watch over the civilian government' (p.140). Such a goal in his view is not unachievable. In terms of the external environment conducive for a meaningful change, the author points to the need to de-escalate its conflict with India, and to delink its dependence on IFIs. In his view, the Kashmir dispute promotes militarism and encourages Islamic militancy, and the dole from IFIs hampers autonomy.

On the question of distributive justice, it is usually suggested by the 'Islamicists' that a properly administered system of *zakat* would serve as an effective mechanism to promote distributive justice in the country. In this context the author considers it ironic that those who emphasize the role of *zakat* in the distribution of national income seem to regard land reform, a source of gross inequality of assets, as un-Islamic.

The author maintains that Islamic jurisprudence gives us no direct guidance on the question of social justice. The underlying emphasis in Islamic history has been the right of the individual to unlimited ownership of property, subject to moderation in his expenditures. The Council of Islamic Ideology holds a similar opinion(p.119).

A number of chapters in the book do not have a direct link with Islam. One such chapter relates to the role of foreign trade. Foreign trade, according to the author, may not succeed in stopping disputes among the trading partners, but it certainly provides an opportunity to encourage dialogue (p.120).

In a section on economic relations with India, the author refers to a study done by Ijaz Nabi and Anjum Nasim to highlight the immense possibilities of expanding bilateral trade between the two countries with the relaxation of restrictions on their mutual trade (p.124).

The author ends with an optimistic note with a hope that the civil society in Pakistan could play a supplementary role in furthering the cause of democracy in the country.■

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Book News	Book News

Holy Warriors: A Journey into the Heart of Indian Fundamentalism by Edna Fernandes is the journey of a journalist in India's recent and past theatres of fundamentalism.
Penguin/Viking, 2006, pp. 332, Rs. 450.00

Street Fighting Years: An Autobiography of the Sixties by Tariq Ali, a new edition of his sixties' memoirs, moves between London, Paris and Berlin, Vietnam and Bolivia and captures, in its encounters with the famous, the mood of those years as the author tracks the growing significance of the nascent protest movement.
Seagull Books, 2005, pp. 403, Rs. 525.00

Manifesto of a Rationalist

Neera Chandhoke

NATION STATE BY ACCIDENT: THE POLITICISATION OF ETHNIC GROUPS AND THE ETHNICISATION OF POLITICS: BOSNIA, INDIA, PAKISTAN
By Carsten Wieland
Manohar Publishers, Delhi, 2006, pp. 455, Rs. 850.00

More often than not ethnic identities are forged through the practices of states such as injustice, discrimination, and the connection of entitlements to religious or caste categories. Entrepreneurs can only sow the seeds of separation in fields that have already been fertilized by resentment and perceived discrimination. The collective political experience seldom comes packed in discrete categories.

Yet another work to add to the overflowing ranks of studies of ethnicity, of nationalism, and of how nations are made and unmade. Yet another work which wonders whether the ethnic card is instrumentally employed by self-serving leaders who are in the business of pursuing power, or whether ethnic identity is a primordial sentiment which comes along with birth. Yet another work which seeks to pattern 'Muslim' nationalism and ethnicity. This work is a manifesto of a rationalist, who has little time and even less patience for 'less civilized' [my term] forms of politics. But it is precisely these forms of politics that have come to command the world. As Wieland points out, so called ethnic conflicts have claimed millions of lives after the end of the Cold War, more than 20,000 persons died in Bosnia alone between 1992 and 1995, and 800,000 died in Rwanda in the year 1994. More troublesome is the fact that if ethnicity undermines the state from below, [supra-national] terrorism attacks it from above. This phenomenon, which has led to countless deaths, mass graves, closures between communities, conflict, and violence, needs to be explained. Wieland's explanation of the phenomenon goes in two directions. One, terrorism is ignited when communities have already been divided in the name of religion or in the name of language. Secondly, ethnic identities are the product of a convergence of circumstances. Quite what those circumstances are forms the main part of the book.

In the historical part of the explanation, the argument is buttressed by reference to 'Muslim' nation building that is the formation of Pakistan, the rise of Hindu nationalism in India and the phenomenon of Muslim nationalism in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Geographically the cases of Bosnia-Herzegovina, India, and Pakistan, admits Wieland are apart, yet they share many parallels. What these parallels are forms the focus of the work under review.

The broad argument is that spokespeople of ethnic groups address certain characteristics or identities of people with the aim of inciting them to group specific behaviour. This constitutes the politicization of ethnic groups. This behaviour changes both the political scenario and political outputs. This phenomenon is termed by the author the ethnicization of politics. In the first case, the ethnic group is a dependent variable which is transformed under the effect of independent variables. In the second case the group is an independent variable which is self-explanatory which determines political agendas. At first glance, the author seems to think in discrete categories, and tends to pack his argument into neatly constructed boxes. For if constructed ethnicity determines political life [completely? partially? mainly? or wholly?] political life also determines the propulsion of ethnicity to the forefront of the many identities that an individual possesses. More often than not ethnic identities are forged through the practices of states such as injustice, discrimination, and the connection of entitlements to religious or caste categories. Entrepreneurs can only sow the seeds of separation in fields that have already been fertilized by resentment and perceived discrimination. The collective political experience seldom comes packed in discrete categories. Further it is debatable that ethnicity can be seen in purely instrumental terms. It is a constantly shifting product of a series of transactions; a product which is constantly being revised and revisited as new transactions occur. Neither is ethnicity frozen in time, nor is ethnicity politicized over time. This particular form of identity as is the case of many other identities, flows and ebbs along with series of political and social transactions, not all of which are confined to ethnicity.

However, despite the fact that in the theoretical introduction, which is frankly confused and despite the fact that the author seems to adopt a determinist stand when it comes to ethnicity and to politics, matters are different when it comes to the historical investigation carried out by Wieland. The chapter on the politicization of the Muslim community in Bosnia-Herzegovina is particularly of significance, because it traces the historical roots of discrimination against the Muslim community, and the consequent tilt of the community towards religion. In the same way in India, communities became conscious of their religious identity at the beginning of the twentieth century for a number of different factors. The historical parallels are perhaps overdrawn, for the radicalization of religious identities had to do with different causes and contexts in the two countries. The point, however, is well taken; ethnic identities are forged in specific contexts: recovery of places of worship, language politics, colonial policies and practices of ethnic mapping, strategies of cultural entrepreneurs, formation of political parties on religious/ethnic lines, and external power intervention. The politicization of ethnicity is the product of historically fashioned circumstances, it is not over determined by the practices of entrepreneurs, though admittedly these agents assiduously work on resentment and angst which has already been produced in the community through the intersection of other practices. In the same vein, Wieland argues that certain factors which emerge under the cover of state structures favour the predominance of ethno-nationalist cleavages over others on the one hand, and unite otherwise heterogeneous factions within the community on the other. The construction of a religious identity at the same time constructs differences between the community and other communities with which the members have a great deal in common. The important point is that ethnic identities are privileged always in response to the construction of the other.

Over time however different factors came to prevail. The Bosnian Muslims are in a process of political and religious homogenization, the Pakistanis are in a process of fragmentation. In Pakistan Muslim ethno-nationalism collapsed as soon as statehood was achieved, and old and new cleavages broke out leading to the fragmentation of the new state. In Bosnia-Herzegovina a similar phenomenon can be observed on the Bosnian-Serb side. In Bosnia the concept of Muslim ethnicity has been strengthened in proportion to the threat against it and subsided shortly after. Though the extreme challenge of the war threw up the danger of physical extermination, Muslim ethno-nation has entered into an advanced stage of homogenization. But unlike the case of Pakistan the Muslim spokespersons do not link this development to a state of their own.

In India the initiative and the mobilization for a nation state came from the Muslim spokespersons themselves. The Bosnian spokespersons acted for integration. If a Muslim nation state does come to be in the country, this may be against the will of the spokespersons. Pakistan, concludes the author, may be a case of active nation building, but Bosnia

Herzegovina can become a case for passive nation building. The irony is that Pakistan has a state but no nation and the Bosnians have a nation but no state. It is perhaps time for the hyphen between state and nation, the author seems to imply, to disappear.

The author has through detailed historical investigation shown us how in an atmosphere of distrust, incidents which otherwise would have been paid no attention to, get worked up to a large degree. These constructed cleavages are at the expense of other identities and other contradictions. In Bosnia-Herzegovina it suddenly became evident that the majority of the landowners were Muslims and the majority of the farmers were Croats or Serbs. This not only gave an added dimension, that of ethnicity, to traditional class conflicts, it ensured that the former prevailed over the latter. In India too social and economic conflicts came to be overlaid by the religious factor.

In sum despite the thrust of the theoretical chapter, the historical parts of the work under review tell a different tale. These chapters tell a tale of how communities that had lived together for centuries were split apart, because of the coming together of other seemingly independent factors. The section tells a tale of how conflicts along the axis of class were submerged in ethnic conflicts. These chapters tell us how thin forms of identification between members of a community, come to prevail over thicker forms of identification with members of another community. And these chapters tell us of the great human tragedies which follow the construction of identity politics.

Therefore the historical parts of the work make for compelling reading, even though the language is at time stilted and grammatically incorrect, and though the author indulges in some grave linguistic excesses which could have been easily avoided. For instance what on earth does the subtitle 'the sweetest fruits hang at the top' on page 94, or 'a pearl without market value' on p. 97, mean? Also the theoretical portions, as remarked earlier, could have been dispensed with because these make for incoherence rather than lend coherence to the narrative. In any case why do historical narratives have to be legitimized by reference to such and such author, or this and this theory? Historical narratives can stand on their own. Consider for instance the following paragraph contained in the intriguingly worded chapter one—'The delicate trio of Ethnicity, Nation, and State': 'but the human being is already nationally predestined merely by virtue of his most personal characteristic, by his very nature. He cannot change his skin, and is thus, by being who he is, the indispensable carrier and the most important political resources of this concept' (p.61). This is but one instance of how the theoretical chapter obfuscates as much as the historical chapter elaborates.■

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Book News	Book News

Historic Battlefields of Pakistan by Johnny Torrens-Spence brings together first-hand information from official reports, private memoirs and local folk traditions to paint a lively picture of eighteen battles fought over time, from ancient times to the late nineteenth century, in the rugged hills of the North West Frontier and the fertile plains of the Punjab.
Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2006, pp. 140, s. 495.00

Field Guide To The Large & Medium-Sized Mammals of Pakistan by T.K. Roberts covers sixty-five species with life history accounts and individual photographs/pen-and-ink drawings made by the author, which make for interesting reading about the many changes which have occurred in the natural landscape of Pakistan.
Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2005, pp. 255, Rs. 275.00

State of the Art in the Art of the State

Kesavan Veluthat

THE STATE IN INDIA: PAST AND PRESENT
Edited by Masaaki Kimura and Akio Tanabe
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2005, pp.325+x, Rs. 595.00

This book, which is the outcome of a workshop on the same title held in Kyoto in December 1999, also contains a few articles written by other scholars and omits a few which were presented there. In its present form, it contains a few samples of the best research available on the state in India, in both its historical and socio-political aspects. The work of the editors as well as many of the contributors give an indication of the interest that Japanese scholarship has been showing on problems of India – historical, social and political. Even the non-Japanese scholars appearing there have given a good account of themselves, thereby making this a statement of the state of the art in the business.

The problem of the state has been engaging the serious attention of historians and other social scientists ever since the end of World War II, particularly for the way in which that institution had grown or overgrown beyond all expectations. The state developed into oversized leviathans and civil liberties, which it was expected to protect, were trampled down. In India, the kind of state that evolved in the seventies of the last century and gave birth to Emergency set scholars thinking about its different dimensions. In the late seventies and early eighties, therefore, we have had a number of brilliant studies on the different dimensions of the state. Some of the most productive debates in Indian historiography, notably concerning the origin of the sate and the feudal character of the "early medieval" state, are products of this period.

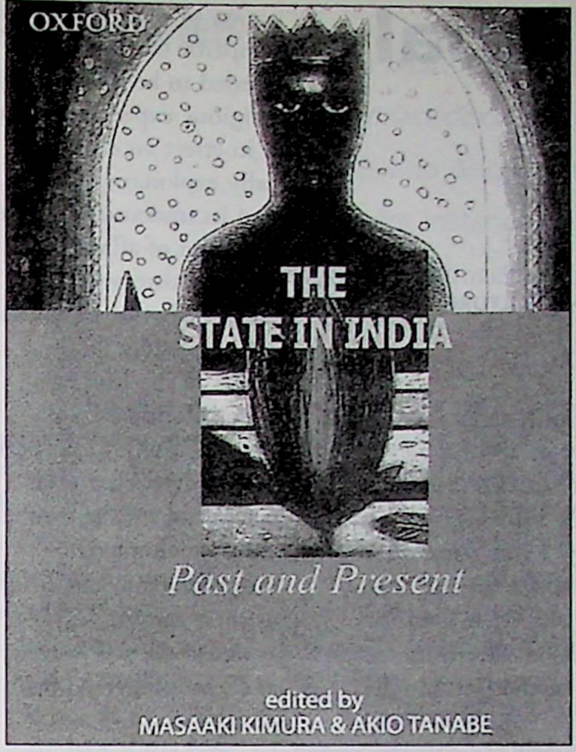
Times have changed. Tremendous changes have taken place in the world order. The fall of the Soviet Union and the failure of Communism in Eastern Europe, the rise of many sub-nationalisms such as religious, ethnic, linguistic, the growth of fundamentalisms of all descriptions such as, again, religious, ethnic, linguistic, regional, casteist, gender based and so on, have compelled alterations of the nature of state in the post-Cold War situation. Questions of sovereignty and legitimacy have raised themselves. The altered conjuncture has also forced the social scientist to look at the state for purposes of analysis and understanding. All these essays represent this later stage in the conditions in which intellectuals are today, addressing questions which concern them and the embattled times in which they live.

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Gen'ichi Yamazaki tries to make an examination of the state and kingship in northern India in the age of the *mahajanapadas* (sixth century BC). Proceeding from the experience of Magadha in the Gangetic plains where objective conditions conducive to the formation of the state were maturing by the sixth century BC, Yamazaki analyses, with the help of later theoretical literature, the factors behind and the structure of the state that came into existence there. The breaking away from the old Vedic traditions and the innovations in administration and military organizations were at the base of it in Magadha. The organization of government and its economic basis also made it different, making it possible for the state to arrive there. Even though purists may raise their eyebrows about the use of later sources in analysing the picture in such early periods, the causal explanations given for the origin of the state are inspiring. A comparison with the experience in the non-monarchical states in the *ganasangahas*, where the graduation into kingship and statehood got stymied, makes the arguments of Yamazaki all the more inspiring.

Hermann Kulke's article on the integrative model of state formation in early medieval India is modestly described as "some historiographical remarks"; but it is a bold statement of his own position in the debate on the nature of the state in the "early medieval" complex in India. Although it may appear a little more autobiographical than necessary, the paper makes the author's point forcefully if a bit too polemically. At the end of it however, one is left wondering if it has effectively answered D.N.Jha's objection that, failing to take into account the economic processes, the paradigms of segmentary state and integrative polity fail to replace the feudal construct.

The essay on the social background of state formation in India by Masaaki Kimura seeks to locate the basis of the state in the "Indian village". This concept, which is essentially the product of the colonial construction of India, continues to hold sway here. One is also rather baffled by the sight of feudalism, segmentary state, and "little kings", all of them swimming about somewhat weightlessly in existential abandon. "Social background of state formation", unfortunately, does not get dilated on.

The next five essays included in the section on "Forms and Process of the State" are specific studies of state and society at various points of time in Indian history. Hiroyuki Kotani' studies of the ideology of state in medieval Deccan with emphasis on the notion of *dosha* and *prayaschitta* as the predominant aspects of it tries to look at the way in which the state worked in late medieval Maharashtra with questions of sin and expiation as prime concerns. Apart from being heavily idealistic, there is also the problem that the issues taken up are inadequately understood. The conclusions do not follow from the arguments which, in any case, are based on a misreading or misunderstanding of evidence.

Sanjay Subrahmanyam "wanders in the bylanes of the history" of late pre-colonial state formation in a "little kingdom" in Andhra, taking up the narratives of the Bobbili War and discerns a landscape of commercialized economy and society where money and values associated with it had made important inroads. It questions the notion, both old and new, of a natural economy and changeless society in pre-British India. Reading the materials, which lend themselves to different epistemological frameworks depending on the location of the reader, Subrahmanyam argues for a possible hermeneutics through which the moral economy of the actors of eighteenth century India could be glimpsed as an approach to the macro-economy. He brings out the complexity of the whole process by showing that neither was economy politically determined nor was politics merely an outcome of developments in economy.

Tsukasa Mizushima's work on the *Mirasi* system is an example of empirical richness and systematic analysis of the pattern of landownership in early modern south India. Mizushima calls the *Mirasi* system as "social grammar" although one is not clear what he means by it. However, the way in which landowners constituted the pillars of the state that was coming into existence is brought out in an effective manner. Akia Tanabe's work is on the kingdom of Khurda in Orissa as it developed in the age of the Mughals and sketches the characteristics of early modernity in India, raising questions of continuity and disjunction in their transformative moments in the shaping of colonial modernity. Nicholas Dirks examines how the British, particularly after the Revolt of 1857, produced a heavy body of ethnographic knowledge concerning India and ordered typologies there as a foundation of the state. Largely condensing his book, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*, Dirks shows how ethnographic knowledge was one of the means of constituting the state.

The third and last section, "Ideas and Problematics of the State" is concerned more with contemporary problems and realities facing the state in India. Peter van der Veer writes about the secularity of the state and shows how Indian secularity has to be seen differently from the separation of religion and politics that was achieved in early modern Europe. He rejects the supposed opposition between religious intolerance and secular liberty, by arguing that the rise of the nation state in India has made new forms of freedom and unfreedom. It may be difficult to go all the way with him; but his formulation demands consideration. Masakazu Tanaka takes up the litigations between the priest-managers of the Chidambaram temple and the Government of Madras and shows how at various points the temple resisted state inroads and how an independent judiciary was instrumental in this. Ashish Nandy's concern is with the way in which state is getting redefined in the context of the greater democratisation of politics. Nandy shows that during the past century and a half the popular culture of Indian politics has been dominated by three images of the Indian state – the protector, the modernizer or the liberator and the arbiter. In recent years the first two images have been relegated to the background and the third one is gaining ground with unhappy consequences. In the last essay, Matin Zuberi examines India's foreign policy at the various points of its evolution after Independence till Pokharan II.

The book is a good representative of the most modern researches on the problem taken up. There may be other studies on similar problems; but that cannot be held against this volume. On the whole, it is a tribute to the interest that international scholarship is showing towards India in the postcolonial context.■

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Empire As A Global Entity

Seema Alavi

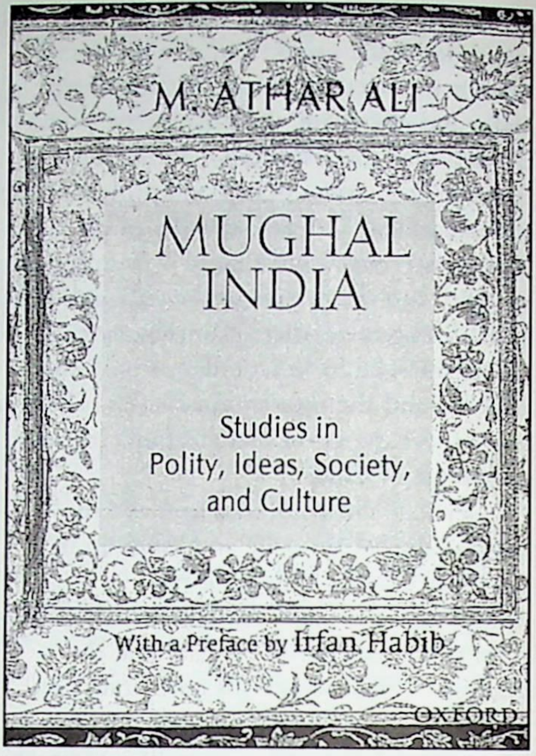
MUGHAL INDIA: STUDIES IN POLITY, IDEAS, SOCIETY AND CULTURE
By M. Athar Ali
Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2006, pp.409, Rs. 695.00

Noted historian Athar Ali died in 1998. The only time I ever met him was at the Jawaharlal Nehru University in 1992 where he interviewed me for a job at the Center of Historical Studies. I had just returned from Cambridge with a brand new PhD degree, which had the stamp of his bete noire Professor C.A. Bayly. I was tense on seeing him as I thought that I would now have to answer for the academic 'follies' of Cambridge historians! I was pretty sure that I was not getting this job. I was surprised. Not only did Professor Ali engage me in a meaningful discussion on the politics and culture of the late Mughal society, but also selected me for the job.

My first and last impression of him as a historian willing to listen and engage with the developments in the outside world is only reinforced as I read this compendium of his writings. This book brings together Ali's varied interests in a long and distinguished career: The Islamic expansion into India and the consolidation of Empires, the ideological underpinnings of the Mughal state, the location of religion in the evolving political culture of the times, the wide cultural embrace of the Empire that connected it to both eastern and western politico-economic processes, and a culturally nuanced understanding of its decline in the early 18th century.

Ali's writings from Aligarh, better known for its empirically rich contributions to the economic referents of Mughal rule, always came as a whiff of fresh air. Like his colleagues he never lost track of the salience of the powerful Mughal state that defined through its exploitative agrarian policies the nature of change in India. But he enriched this understanding by adding to it fresh cultural frills. As the argument got nuanced it also often tended to inadvertently de-center the state in the narrative. However, this was rarely acknowledged by Ali. Thus his major contribution on Mughal ruling classes (the nobility), systematized administrative institutions and political sovereignty at one level bring to our notice the sophisticated mechanisms of centralization of power in the hands of the monarch. Yet, he cautions that institutions like the nobility, jagir and mansabs also have the potential to create cracks in this edifice. He views the evolution of absolute political sovereignty as the Mughal way to balance out such unsavoury effects of systematization. Thus the Emperor according to him constructs a dynastic past and uses religious and spiritual authority to ensure his centralized control over society. The suggestion is that the power of the state has its limits and entails continuous negotiations.

The freshness of Ali's writings lies in his, even if inadvertent, alluding to the difficult path to centralization. His attempt to alert the reader to the thin line between stability, consolidation of power, and institutional systematization is noteworthy. Indeed his discussion of culture and religion is foregrounded in these concerns. And they add that extra spice to Ali's brand of Aligarh history. Thus his discussions on the use of religion by Akbar points to the continuous process of negotiations the Emperor had to undertake. This was critical to consolidate his rule despite the institutions of systematized revenue collection being in place. Again, he tells us that the authority that Akbar got in 1579 to interpret Islamic law and be its legislator and later his role as a Sufi spiritual guide are ways to reach out and control effectively not just the Muslims but the non-Muslim society as well. And he shows that this process of striking the right balance was no easy task. Of course, Ali works within the Aligarh frame of state centric history and therefore while discussing religion and culture he does not pause to ask why the political sovereignty of even a powerful Emperor like Akbar needed to be grounded in religious experimentation if in effect an economically exploitative state and its institutions was at the helm of affairs.



Ali's history is also noteworthy for its forays into the wider cultural world of the Mughals. Mughal contacts with Asian as well as European powers impacted their rule in no small measure. Yet they are rarely integrated into our study of their Empire. Ali is amongst the few historians who pioneered this exercise and offered refreshing insights into Mughal history. He brings to us an account of the global launch of the Empire. In an influential discussion on the development of 'international law' or conventions he tells us how they were not entirely Euro-centric. Instead, they emerged also out of the Mughal dealing with a range of Asian Empires: Safavid Iran, the Uzbek Khans and the Ottomans. Indeed the Mughals, he tells us, were conscious that their Empire was a component of a worldwide system of states.

Ali was perhaps one of the few historians of Mughal India who made us think of the Empire not in an insular regional way but as a global entity that had a sensitive finger on world developments. He discusses at different places in his writings the critical role the silver rupee and the introduction of artillery played in adding new sources of strength and stability to the Empire. Both were results of increased European interaction, which in turn was the result of changed global circumstances. The discovery of the New World by the Spanish and the colonization of its silver resources increased silver inputs into India via the European traders. It also opened new sea routes to India. These brought more traders and more export trade. Increased European presence also brought in artillery making techniques into India. According to Ali these developments changed the nature of European trade. As Indian luxury items flooded European markets, the prices of these items rose in India. This adversely affected the urban ruling classes, and only increased their appetite to exploit the rural countryside. This brought economic doom to northern India.

Ali's discussions on Mughal culture and religion also show that he saw the Empire not merely as a revenue extracting entity. It was for him equally important to understand that it was also an Empire of knowledge and of the pen. He brings to our notice not just the political treatises that were written in the Empire, but also translations of Hindu religious texts into Persian. The chapter on homegrown texts in Persian like the *Dabistan-I-Mazahib* shows Muslim writing of other non-Hindu religions also like Judaism and Christianity. The only frustrating part of reading all these concerns of Ali is that he opens for us new facets of Mughal power, and yet attempts no revision of Mughal rule on the basis of his new details. Indeed as his essay on the 18th century shows he is very critical of any such attempts. In the ultimate analysis it is the exploitative arm of the state that prevails in his writings. This is a dampner for the reader whom he excites by loosening the cultural boundaries of Empire, both internal and external. The incompatibility between the culturally embracive Mughal state and the Marxist framework of uniform systematized economic exploitation looms large in Ali's writings. But one wonders if he himself ever saw these as problematical.■

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Confluence of Disciplines

Upinder Singh

TEXT AND PRACTICE: ESSAYS ON SOUTH ASIAN HISTORY
By Ronald Inden with and introduction by Daud Ali
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006, pp.372, Rs. 695.00

Many critiques tend to exaggerate the power and impact of Orientalist discourses, ignoring the existence of the divergent voices and discourses of the 'Orientals' themselves. This is the case, for instance, when Inden talks about the Orientalists having produced in India the Orient of their constructs.

Daud Ali's introduction points out that the essays in this book represent an eventful phase in writings on South Asian history, one marked by the confluence of disciplines, especially history and anthropology. Ronald Inden in fact describes himself as an Indologist, historian and anthropologist of India, all rolled into one. The main focus of his work is medieval South Asia, but his writings range freely over and across pre-colonial and postcolonial pasts, drawing attention to the links between them. Religion, caste and kingship are among the important themes that he has explored in his influential writings.

The starting point of Inden's approach – and the subject of the first essay of this book – is a powerful critique of Orientalist constructs of knowledge. This goes beyond the nexus between knowledge and power to try to penetrate the deepest, most fundamental levels of Orientalist discourse and in fact to lay bare the epistemological basis of *all* the social sciences that purport to deal with other cultures. Using the categories of Freud's dream analysis (I am not convinced that this really gives us a deeper insight into Orientalist constructs), Inden questions Orientalism's claims to objective knowledge and the hierarchical relationship it posits between the knower and the known. More specifically with regard to Indology, he questions its essentializing tendencies, its unitary view of cultures, its curious combination of societalism and individualism, its view of Indian thought as irrational, symbolic and mythical, its caste fixation and its assumption that the essence of Indian civilization is the opposite of that of the West.

Many critiques tend to exaggerate the power and impact of Orientalist discourses, ignoring the existence of the divergent voices and discourses of the 'Orientals' themselves. This is the case, for instance, when Inden talks about the Orientalists having produced in India the Orient of their constructs. In a clear case of overkill (p. 21), he questions whether Gandhi's concept of nonviolence would have played a central part in the national movement had the Orientalists not singled it out as the defining feature of the Hindu character.

Drawing inspiration from Collingwood, Gramsci, Foucault, and Derrida, among others, Inden moves from his critique to outlining a more ambitious agenda. He aims "to establish a space for the production of a new knowledge of South Asia" (p. 13), to transform intellectual practices and make them more egalitarian and multi-centred (p. 58). "The capacity to have true knowledge and to act have to be, as it were, returned to the many Others from whom Western practices have taken it" (p. 58).

Conceptual categories are crucial to Inden's vision of a new history of South Asia and he constructs a new vocabulary. He prefers the word 'agent' rather than 'individual' or 'subject' as the latter two words "silently convert agency into a property of the biologically determined persons or psychologically determined minds that inhabit the world of modern intellectual practice" (p. 246). He prefers the word 'polity' to 'state' or 'nation state' "because I want to cover a wider range of composite or complex agents than the term state which, as many use it, takes as given rather than problematic the existence of a polity as an agent in which the transcendent is already manifest" (p.246). He prefers the phrase 'liberating practices' rather than rituals, while talking about processions and planning policies. He uses the terms 'embodying' and 'embodiment' for the processes by which such practices are supposed to bring about the promised liberation. 'Life wishes' denote people's variously elaborated desires and are preferred to 'conceptually inflated' terms such as ideology and religion. An important point (and one that historians would do well to consider carefully) is that Inden does not see these life-wishes as a reflection of something else, but as an integral part of people's attempts to order and transform the world in which they live.

The essay on the ceremony of *mahadana* (the great gift) addresses the larger issue of the relationship between Vedic sacrifice and Hinduism. Moving decisively away from a perspective of gradual evolution and transformation leading from one to the other, he highlights the need to ground this issue in history. He puts forward a hypothesis of two major and sudden transformations in the 'great tradition' of ancient India. One was connected with the establishment of Buddhism as the dominant religion of the imperial kingdoms of the subcontinent during the time of Asoka, and the other with "the establishment of Hinduism as the dominant religion of the later Indic states" (p 90). During the first phase, the Buddhist stupa and monastery were central cultic institutions and the Buddhist great gift ceremony and the honouring of the Buddha the central imperial ceremonials. This gave way in the early medieval period, Inden continues, to worship in Hindu temples as the central cult of Indian imperial kingdoms and the emergence of the Hindu *mahadana* as the central ceremonial. The developments in the first phase hierarchized and regionalized the tradition of the old Vedic animal sacrifice and those in the second phase led to the abandonment of this sacrifice as a separate ritual performance.

The logic and dynamics underlying religious change and royal policy in ancient and early medieval South Asia certainly need to be explored and understood, but many aspects of Inden's central hypothesis are problematic and are not supported by sufficient empirical evidence. These include the assertion of the consistent centrality of Buddhist institutions and ceremonies in imperial 'Aryan states' (what does this phrase mean?) from the 3rd century B.C. to the end of the 7th century A.D.. And apart from the injunctions in Ashoka's edicts (the range of application and effectiveness of which can be questioned), where is the evidence that imperial rulers effectively forbade the performance of Vedic sacrifices by conquered kings (p. 92)? Similarly problematic is the argument that throughout this phase, Buddhism was the religion of imperium and Vedic sacrifice the tradition of regional organization, and that there was an oscillation from one to the other depending on the vicissitudes of power politics. Further, here, as in some of the other essays in this book, Inden's understanding of religion seems too state/polity centred.

Inden avoids the pitfalls of the Indological and Orientalist approaches he is so critical of by carefully unravelling the many layers of meanings in the world of texts through a close and meticulous reading, always within a historical framework, and through a very self-conscious and scrupulous use of appropriate conceptual categories. The essay on hierarchies of kings in medieval India, based on the *Aparajitaprichchha*, a 11th/12th century text of Gujarat, looks closely at the implications of political hierarchy and the relationship between king and temple. The

Vishnudharmottara Purana is a text that is central to many of the other essays – those on lordship and caste in Hindu discourse, on kings and omens, on the temple and the 'Hindu chain of Being,' and on the Hindu concept of evil.

Inden identifies several problems in the writings of Indologist J.C. Heesterman. He argues that the latter's unitary view of dharma and the Indian tradition is more dependent on a European metaphysics of dichotomies and essences than it is on evidence within the Indian texts. Inden's own view of tradition factors in change and allows for divergent, discordent voices. He makes the important point that "people did not always agree with one another within a tradition or even about what constitutes their tradition" (p. 102). The evidence in texts reflects "different claims contesting for hegemony rather than expressions of a unitary tradition." (p. 125). These issues are brought out in his essay on changes in the Vedic priesthood from the early centuries BC to the 8th/9th centuries.

And yet, given his nuanced, historical understanding of the complexity and diversity within 'tradition,' Inden too sometimes talks of specific ideas (for intance those of kingship) as emblematic of the entire Indic or Hindu world. The normative views of certain texts are often presented as the only, authoritative view. In one place (p. 161), the *Mahabharata* is described as 'Hinduism's basic text.' But Inden's analysis and conclusions are more often based on a Pancharatra text, the *Vishnudharmottara Purana*. Given the plurality of texts and traditions, and the fact that the ideas of these texts were often subverted in practice, why this particular text be considered as embodying 'Hindu' or 'Indic' ideas has to be explained. In fact, one of the ways of moving decisively beyond the limitations of traditional Indology (which tends to treat texts as closed, self-contained and self-sufficient worlds in themselves) is to take cognisance of the rich store of *non*-textual sources for the history of ancient and early medieval India.

The last two essays in this book include reflections on the meaning of identity. The essay titled 'Embodying God' makes some thought-provoking connections between ancient and medieval royal processions, the mixed metaphors of British processions in the colonial period, and their carrying-over in the notion of the march of progress in independent India. The argument is an interesting one, although it tends to get submerged in the history of planning and Nehruvian socialism, Mahalanobis, big dams and the changes brought about through the new economic policies of liberaralization. The moral of the story is that connections between the past and the present are stronger than we think, although it can be argued that they are part of a complex web consisting of multiple strands rather than a single genealogy.■

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Narratives and Counter-Narratives

Sabyasachi Bhattacharya

M.A. JINNAH: VIEWS AND REVIEWS
Edited by Muhammad Reza Kazimi
Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2005, pp. xvi + 260, Rs. 495.00

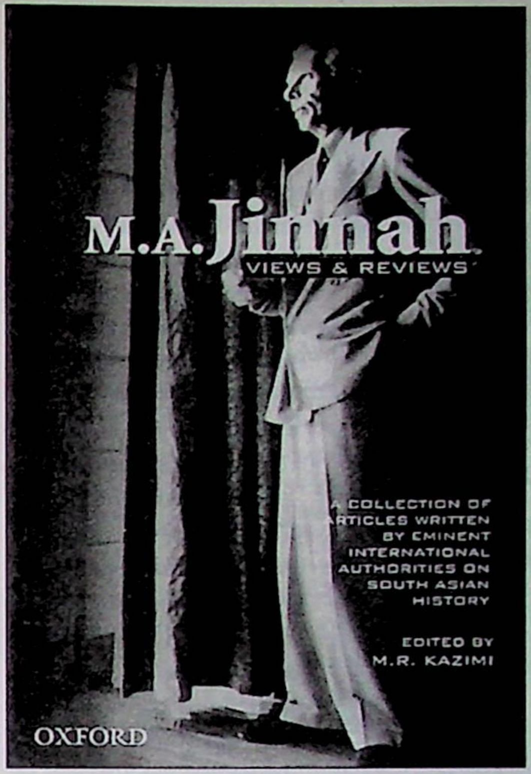
JINNAH: SECULAR AND NATIONALIST
By Ajeet Jawed
Faiz Books, Delhi, pp. xi + 392, Rs. 295.00

The price of being the father of a nation is that one's life must be up to the consequent expectations. And such a leader's life is retrospectively reconstructed in a manner which puts paint and pasteboard hero worship above true assessment of the life and work of the person in reality. It is therefore not surprising that Mr. M.A. Jinnah has been reinvented. That has happened to many other great leaders as well. The historian's problem in this instance, however, is compounded by an additional twist. Mr. Jinnah reinvented himself more than once.

To begin with, Jinnah (the name he preferred since he changed his childhood name 'Jinnahbhai' in 1894, at age 18) was a perfect member of the Indian National Congress. When he attended his first Congress session in Bombay in 1904, many of the members of that body were like him, enlightened gentlemen, anglicized in their life-style, and stout defenders of the idea of self-government by the natives of India within the parameters laid down by the British Indian legal and institutional set-up. Till 1920 Jinnah was a loyal Congress member: the Secretary to the President, Dadabhai Naroji, at the Calcutta session of Congress in 1906; a Congress legislator elected from Bombay in 1910; the valued companion of Gokhale during his trip to England in 1913; and in 1916 one of the authors of the famous Hindu-Muslim Pact of Lucknow. In 1918 Sarojini Naidu wrote a tract on *Muhammad Ali Jinnah: Ambassador of Unity*.

In 1920 this political personality underwent a drastic change. Was it because this fairly senior member of the Congress felt upstaged by a newcomer, Mr. M.K. Gandhi? Or was it due to a well-known incident when in the Congress session Gandhi exhorted him to speak in Gujarati which he was unable to do? Or was it because of a deeper-seated reason, his conviction that Gandhi and the Khilafat movement brought into the Congress a religious tone which Jinnah could not approve of? Historians have speculated about the reason but the outcome was clear. Jinnah's exit from the scene which was his natural habitat till 1919 or 1920. He had already joined the Muslim League at the Bankipore session of the Council in 1912. Jinnah was in fact instrumental in scheduling the 1915 session of the League with the Session of the Indian National Congress to make the negotiations leading to the Lucknow Pact of 1916 possible. From about 1920 he became a more enthusiastic Leaguer, leaving behind his incarnation as a Congressman. In the new phase, while being a leader of the Muslim community, he was far from being a rabid communalist. In 1923 he said at the All India Muslim League Session in Lahore: "India will get Dominion responsible Government the day the Hindus and Muslims are united." (S.S. Pirzada, *Foundation of Pakistan: Muslim League Documents*). However, a new tone was heard in his statement as the outgoing President in 1926: the emphasis was on the undeniable "differences" between the communities which needed to be settled and the "desire for nothing but justice and fairness." The seventy-odd communal riots that took place in many parts of India between August 1923 and July 1926 probably had a bearing on this change of tone.

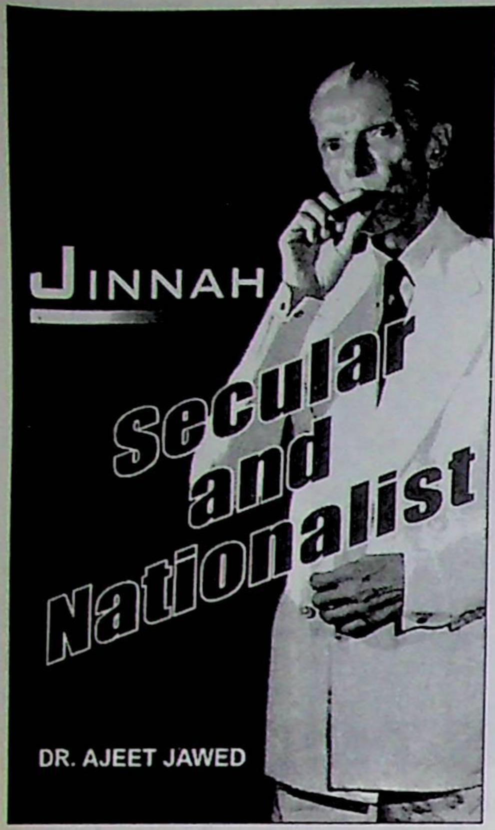
Be that as it may, Jinnah was not by any means pursuing a communalist line, much to the chagrin of a substantial section of the Muslim



League. What seems to have pushed him over the brink was his failure in December 1928 to have the Motilal Nehru Report to the All Parties Conference amended to accommodate Muslim expectations. Jinnah was away in England when the report was drafted, mainly by Motilal and Sapru, and the Muslim League's perception was that the proposed joint electorate without "sufficient safeguard" for the minority promised a disaster. Ignoring the recommendation of the Bombay Provincial League or counsels of men like Suhrawardy of Bengal, Jinnah persuaded the League to send a delegation to the All Parties Conference. However, Jinnah's proposal regarding amendment of the Nehru Report, chiefly to secure for Muslims one-third of Central Legislature seats and seats proportionate to population in Bengal and Punjab, was opposed strongly by conservative Congress members and by the Hindu Mahasabha and ultimately rejected by the Conference. "No appeals seemed capable of shifting the Mahasabha, and the Congress leaders refused to commit themselves to one side or the other…." (David Page, *Prelude to Partition*, 1982, p. 166) This was the occasion when Jinnah supposedly made the famous statement, "this is the parting of the ways," according to Hector Bolitho's pioneering biography of Jinnah.

From the end of 1928 Jinnah enters a third phase. He was transiting to a new role and this phase included a few years in 'exile' in England. For him his failure to obtain concession at the All Parties Conference was a crisis since his discomfiture was exacerbated by a split in the League; the splinter group, headed towards the All India Muslim Conference which framed its own demands, far exceeding what Jinnah had asked for at the All Parties Conference. Jinnah's famous 'fourteen point demands' was his answer to this threat from within. However, that stance he took decided the course of his politics – in the immediate future his position at the first and second Round Table Conferences. The Communal Award was welcomed by him but he waited in England for the opportune movement when that scheme would come into effect. In 1935-37 Jinnah threw himself into a frenzy of pre-election organizational work. By all accounts Jinnah in this phase of his life came closest to being a party leader actively participating in building up a base, increasing membership, locating second rank leaders who would act as provincial satraps, and also mobilizing funds and media mouthpieces. This is when Jinnah asked Liaquat Ali to be the General Secretary of the League. "Jinnah's presidential address to the Muslim League in October 1937 was, in fact a declaration of war against the Congress," according to Anita Inder Singh (*Origins of the Partition*, 1987, p.25) The spectacular success of the Congress in the election of 1937, was not something Jinnah could easily get over, and thereafter the hardnosed attitude of the Congress against any coalition and the Muslim mass contact programme (however limited might have been its achievements), put paid to the last remnant of negotiation space between the Muslim leaders and the Congress.

Now Jinnah reinvented himself as the sole spokesman with the image of a leader with the one point agenda of battling for the Muslim community's interest, if need be at the cost of partitioning the country. This is the image of Jinnah that left a lasting impression on the public mind on both sides of the border which was to be erected in 1947, while



the earlier political incarnations of the previous four decades were virtually forgotten. He was the supreme power, first upon being made President of the League in 1937, then as the prospective instrument for the realization of the League's 'Pakistan Resolution' of 1940, and later by a resolution regarding his role at the League conference in Delhi in 1943; Jinnah was authorized to "take every step or action as he may consider necessary in furtherance of and relating to the objects of the Muslim League as he deems proper." As far as the League was concerned he was indeed the 'sole spokesman.' According to Sir Penderel Moon of the ICS, the government in Britain till 1946 had an ambiguous attitude, because "though the importance of Jinnah could not be ignored, his firm adherence to the demand for Pakistan was believed to be for bargaining purposes." (*Divide and Quit*, 1961, p. 42) But the elections of 1946 "triumphantly vindicated" Jinnah.

In the books under review the one by Dr. Ajeet Jawed focuses mainly on the phases earlier to 1937, i.e. prior to the last phase outlined above. She may or may not agree with my account of the four successive phases in Jinnah's political career, but she would probably agree that her story is stronger in respect of the pre-1937 period, the period often neglected by historians. The adjectives in the title, 'Secular and Nationalist', are probably meant to apply to that period. To what extent the term secularist applies is not beyond question even in the pre-1937 phase. While it is true that, as the author points out, Jinnah often spoke against the system of communal representation through reservation of seats, we must remember that he offered himself as a candidate for such a seat in 1910 and he occupied a reserved Muslim seat for many years in the legislature. While it is true that in his personal habits he was not an orthodox Muslim (his family was Shiite Khoja) and he married the Parsi millionaire Petite's daughter, she was converted to Islam before marriage. While it is true that Jinnah is on record condemning intrusion of religion into politics (the most important instance being Gandhi's engagement in the Khilafat movement), the line between that and defending the interests of a community defined by religion was and remains rather thin in Indian political practice. The truth of the matter seems to be that as an enlightened westernized gentleman of liberal disposition he was welcomed in the scene of Congress politics for a long while, and at the same time as a brilliant lawyer and defender of Muslim interests within constitutional parameters he was too competent to be ignored by coreligionists. When Sarojini Naidu in her tract on Jinnah called him 'Ambassador of Unity' in 1918, she was right in evaluating his role as a go-between, almost a *dubash*, a role khoja merchants played for generations on the West Coast. But then, the traditional role of the colonial intelligentsia has often been similar to that of *dubashes*.

Jawed's book deserves wide circulation because it is one of the most readable accounts of Jinnah's political career since the publication of Hector Bolitho's *Jinnah: The Creator of Pakistan* (1954) and Stanley Wolpert's *Jinnah of Pakistan* (1984). Her research into published contemporary accounts by friends and acquaintances as well as the newsmedia is admirably thorough. She has missed out a few sources like Jinnah's right hand man M.H. Ispahani's memoirs and correspondence with Jinnah (published from Karachi in 1967) and for some reason she has scarcely used the *Transfer of Power* documents edited by Mansergh, although it is listed in the bibliography. Originally published in 1998, Jawed's 'updated edition' has been published in response to, according to the author, "the recent debate over Mohammad Ali Jinnah" as an "apostle of United India." (p. ix). In "post-Independence Indian history", the author says, Jinnah has been unfairly depicted as the "one man responsible for the creation of Pakistan."

The alternative thesis proposed by Jawed is that "for Jinnah, Pakistan was a bargaining counter to settle his personal accounts with the Congress and to humble its leaders who had questioned even his representative character and had tried to finish him politically" (p. 340). Jinnah did not want Pakistan (p. 352). Ayesha Jalal in her well-known work, *The Sole Spokesman* (1985), it may be recalled, made a similar statement: Pakistan should be seen "as a bargaining counter, which had the merit of being acceptable (on the face of it) to the majority of Muslims, and of being totally unacceptable to the Congress and in the last resort the British also. This in turn provided the best insurance that the League would not be given what it now apparently was asking for, but which Jinnah in fact did not really want" (p. 57).

From the evidence in Jawed's book it is clear that well before she or even Jalal speculated on these lines, many had done so. M.N. Roy, for instance, writes that in his times few might agree but "impartial and dispassionate historians" would recognize what Roy believed: "I for one do not believe that he really wanted partition of the country. Like a gambler overconfident of his wits, he staked high believing that the other party would compromise on his terms …. Jinnah was driven to the bitter end of gaining a victory he himself dreaded and which he did not survive." (Roy, *Men I Met*). Likewise Sir Penderel Moon (*Divide and Quit*) recalls that the talk of the town was that Jinnah had confided to "one or two people in Lahore" that the Pakistan Resolution of the League conference in Lahore in 1940 was 'a tactical move'. Jinnah's friend Kanji Dwarkadas wondered why Jinnah spent a fortune to rebuild his house in Bombay in the early forties, if he was aiming at partition. And so forth.

It is plausible that Jinnah was uncertain of the future. That is not the same thing as stating that he did not want Pakistan. It is possible to argue that to talk of Pakistan was a useful tactical move, but that does not mean that Pakistan was no more than that. It is certain that, as Jawed and other historians have shown, Jinnah was unwilling to spell out what Pakistan meant, but that suggests pragmatic awareness of the consequences of Partition, including immense misery among his own constituents, but not a negation of the idea of Pakistan.

None of the above stances on the part of Jinnah necessarily mean that he was against the idea of Pakistan. This appears to be the commonsense inference from what happened, leaving aside speculations about things happening in his mind.

There is, however, a point implicit in Jawed's depiction of the path to Pakistan. This point might have been made explicit in this work. Is it correct to interpret the emergence of Pakistan entirely or mainly in terms of the machinations of one man, Jinnah? Is that scenario correct in attributing to the role of one individual in history a disproportionately large agency and causative function?

That brings us to the other book under review here, *M.A. Jinnah,* a collection of essays edited by M.R. Kazimi, a Professor of History in Karachi and author of a biography of Liaqat Ali Khan. The sub-title of this book '*Views and Reviews*', reflects an attempt to re-evaluate the role of Jinnah in the history of pre-independence India and the emergence of Pakistan. Some of the essays, specially the essay by Sharif al Mujahid, specifically address the question of 'the role of the individual in history'. Al Mujahid's contention is that "Jinnah was the right man at the right place and at the right time" – but the place and time, the political situation in British India and the historical conjuncture he faced were not of his making (p. 157). This essay cleaves a middle path between the

determinist theory positing inevitability of Pakistan and the 'great man' theory that it was the result of one man's effort. Bismarck, another fabled creator of a nation, is quoted: "My influence on the events I took advantage of is usually exaggerated, but it could never occur to anyone to demand that *I should make history* .... We cannot make history: we must wait while it is being made." Perhaps the modesty assumed in this self-appraisal by Bismarck might not have come naturally to Jinnah, but the analogy suggested is instructive. On the whole one cannot but agree with Al Mujahid's basic contention: "Whatever the strength, the momentum and the intensity of historical forces working towards Pakistan, without the matching of the character – in this case that of Jinnah – with the circumstances, it could not have come the way, nor at the time, it did" (p.150).

Apart from such amendments of the 'great man' theory, this collection is interesting also as a pointer to other kinds of revision historiography in Pakistan is possibly undergoing. Ayesha Jalal's work created a huge critical reaction in Pakistan: was Pakistan merely a *bargaining counter*? One could almost hear the protest against this heresy rising to a crescendo. Here we have her revised statement. "In so far as politics is the art of the possible, bargaining is an intrinsic part of that art. To suggest, as some have glibly done, that Mohammed Ali Jinnah used Pakistan merely as a ruse against the Congress is a gross distortion of not only my argument, but of the actual history" (p.120). Her argument now is that "while the insistence on *National* status of India Muslims became a non-negotiable issue after 1940, (i.e. the Lahore resolution of the League on Pakistan), the demand for a wholly separate and sovereign *state* of Pakistan remained open to negotiation as late as the summer of 1946. A refusal to acknowledge this is a result of the failure to draw an analytical distinction between nation and state" (p. 120, my italics). She is also critical of the methodological error in taking the fact of Pakistan as the point of departure for interpreting the evolution of the demand for Pakistan.

Ian Talbot, on the other hand, attributes to Jinnah a far greater role than "Pakistani propaganda can easily admit." In the essay reprinted in this volume, Talbot questions the propaganda line which presents Jinnah as the mouthpiece of the Muslim community in British India for their homeland, to argue that "many of those who had voted for the Muslim League (in the election of 1946) had done so more out of personal loyalty to its candidates than out of support for Pakistan" (p. 87). He goes so far as to say that the representation of the election victory of 1946 as the mandate for Pakistan was a 'confidence trick' by Jinnah. Talbot revised this view later in the book *Freedom's Cry* (1996) in that he saw later in his evidence "a groundswell of support" for Pakistan, utilized by a small Muslim elite. Alan Whaites of the SOAS on the other hand contests this view of elite manipulation: "the Two Nation theory was a more powerful force in the minds of the Muslims of the minority provinces than were the elite interests which have often been ascribed to them ... (by) 1946-47 the beliefs underpinning Pakistan had converged with the interests of the (Muslim) majority provinces to provide a genuine ideological commitment to Muslim ... self-government" (p. 105). And thus the debate goes on among Pakistan experts, mostly British and North American. The scholars from Pakistan who are included in this work are Kazimi, the editor of this book in a long review of literature on Jinnah produced in India, Al Mujahid and Jalal whom we have noticed earlier, and Syed Jaffar Ahmed, the Director of the Pakistan Study Centre in Karachi University. The latter offer some important observations.

Ahmed's point of departure is the 'interesting paradox that Jinnah, who mattered so much in the creation of the country, has influenced so little in shaping it into what it has become today' (p.171). Perhaps one can sum up his thesis under three heads, First, historically speaking "Muslim separatism was not a given or a priority thing as far as Jinnah was concerned" (p. 174). He was forced to seek a Muslim homeland. "After the creation of Pakistan, Jinnah was mindful that the same mistake of letting the nation divide into a majority and minority on religious lines should not be repeated." Jinnah's well-known speech on 11 August 1947 is cited to show that to him religion was a *personal* faith, and it was not to be mixed up with each person's role "in the *political* sense as citizens of the State." Jaffar Ahmed points out that this approach was ignored after 1948 by Jinnah's successors and "the state increasingly indulged in matters which eroded its neutrality." Secondly, Ahmed refers to "the menace of religious extremism and intolerance", the rise of militant organizations who "have not only been engaged across the borders, in Afghanistan and Indian-held Kashmir, but ... within the country ... The most unfortunate aspect of the extremist religious phenomenon is that it has been cultivated under the patronage of the state's own security apparatus." Thirdly, Ahmed reminds us of Jinnah's constitutionalist approach and how he exhorted "the military to abide by discipline, and not to break ranks with the government it was under oath to be loyal to" (p. 172). "Today the country, which was achieved through political and constitutional means, seems to be groping for the means which might help civilianise its fourth military rule". The Constitution of 1973 had been held in abeyance too often by "military rulers in cohesion with a pliable judiciary."

Such ideas and the revisionism in historiography may be straws in the wind indicating a new wind blowing in our neighbouring country. That is why this book edited by Kazimi is of importance. It is not meant to be a complete history of Jinnah's times. Thus the omission of certain things may be accidental. For instance, the only two fleeting references to Direct Action are by a British historian and an Indian who is cited for a critical assessment. The 'constitutionalist' Jinnah's statement on the eve of Direct Action in 1946 is not noticed in these essays : "This day we bid good bye to constitutions and constitutional methods." On the meaning of Direct Action, Jinnah said "I am not going to discuss ethics" (Sucheta Mahajan, *Independence and Partition,* 2000, p. 225). In the Indian narratives of that period and political memoirs there is an overwhelming emphasis on Direct Action by the League.

The bottomline seems to be that not only do historians situated in different spatio-temporal contexts look at Jinnah differently, but a lot depends also on what phase of his long political career one is looking at. Of the four phases outlined in the beginning of this review the last one, 1935-1948, has attracted most attention. Hence the focus on works by Francis Robinson (*Separatism Among Indian Muslims,* 1974), R.J. Moore (*Escape From Empire,* 1979), Anita Inder Singh (*Origins of Partition of India, 1936-47,* 1987), Sucheta Mahajan (*Independence and Partition,* 2000), Al Mujahid (in the volume under review), or Penderel Moon (*Divide and Quite,* 1961) or G.D. Khosla (*Stern Reckoning,* 1989). This is Jinnah, the sole spokesman driven by the urge to claim a place in the sun for Muslims, and eventually a 'Muslim homeland'. On the other hand, those who have considered as well the earlier phases of 1906-1920 or 1920-28, such as David Page (*Prelude to Partition, 1920-32,* 1982), Stanley Wolpert (*Jinnah of Pakistan,* 1984), Ayesha Jalal (*Sole Spokesman,* 1985), or Ajeet Jawed (2005), tend to emphasize the image of Jinnah as the constitutionalist, emphasizing the state's role of neutrality between communities, and at the same time bargaining tirelessly for ways and means of accommodating Muslim interest representation within the political system where Congress occupied a large space. Since 1947 Jinnah's elevated status as the creator of Pakistan has had a bearing on many historians' judgment. With Jinnah reinventing himself and his strategies more than once, there were bound to be inconsistencies – that is perfectly within the norms in politics. It does, however, create in historical narratives a 'Roshomon effect' and the different contending versions of Jinnah's life and work will thus continue to be a puzzle open to different readings. That usually happens to any segment of history which continues to be vitally relevant to later times.■

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A Potpourri on Pakistan

Kalim Bahadur

DEAR MR. JINNAH; SELECTED CORRESPONDENCE AND SPEECHES OF LIAQUAT ALI KHAN, 1937-1947
Edited by Roger D.Long
Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2004, pp.xiv+328, Rs.495.00

EQBAL AHMAD: BETWEEN PAST & FUTURE—SELECTED ESSAYS ON SOUTH ASIA
Edited by Dohra Ahmad, Iftikhar Ahmad and Zia Mian
Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2004, pp. 329, Rs. 450.00

ACROSS THE WAHGAH; AN INDIAN'S SOJOURN IN PAKISTAN
By Maneesha Tikekar
Promilla & Co., in association with Bibliophile South Asia, New Delhi, 2004, pp. 360, Rs. 350.00

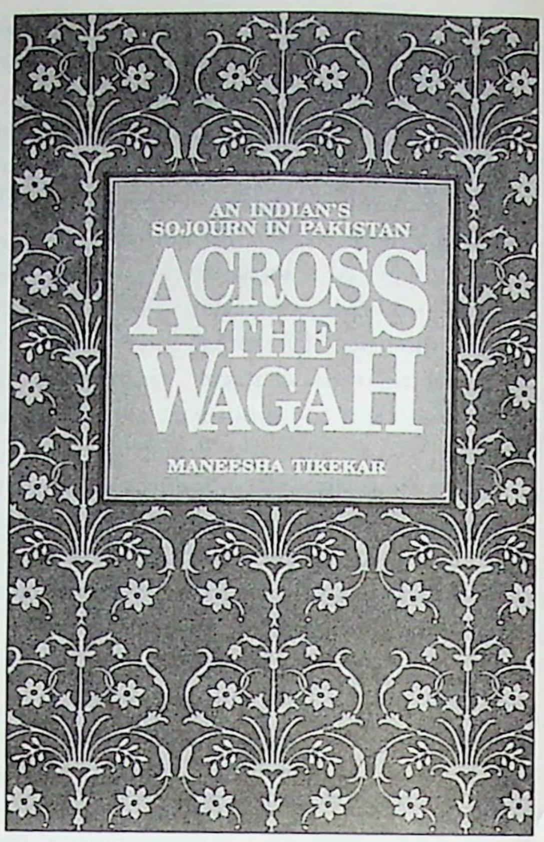
A TRAVEL COMPANION TO THE NORTHERN AREAS OF PAKISTAN
By Tahir Jahangir
Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2005, pp. viii+ 140, Rs. 295.00

Liaquat Ali Khan, the first Prime Minister of Pakistan after independence and the secretary of the All India Muslim League during the crucial period of the Pakistan movement (1936-1946) is one of the less known figures of that country. Belonging to a rich feudal family, he was educated at Aligarh and Oxford. After Oxford he went to the Inner Temple and was called to the Bar. However, unlike Jinnah he did not practise law, entered politics and joined the Muslim League in 1923. He was an active member of the United Provinces Zamindar Association. It is said that his close association with Jinnah began when Liaquat Ali Khan visited U.K in 1933 and persuaded Jinnah, who had settled there, to return to India to lead the Muslim League. Jinnah took another year to finally decide to return to India in 1935.

The selected letters included in this collection between Jinnah and Liaquat mainly belong to the period 1937-1946 which was crucial for India's independence movement. It was also the time when after the so-called Pakistan Resolution was passed by the Muslim League in its Lahore session in March 1940 the party became a mass movement of the Muslims of the Muslim minority provinces. In contrast to this the League had suffered a devastating defeat in those provinces during the election in 1937. It was also the time when the communal divide began to widen.

Most of the letters included in this collection deal with routine matters where Liaquat as secretary of the League had to consult and seek the party president Jinnah's directions on day to day matters of the organization. Most of them are related to such questions as of starting a daily paper, the *Dawn*, the appointment of its editor, the dates for holding the meetings of the Party executive, etc. The major political issues of this period were the Pakistan resolution, the dissidence of the Punjab Muslim League led by Sikander Hayat Khan, the participation of some Muslim League leaders in the National Defence Council, established by the Viceroy to help in the war effort, the revolt by the Bengal leader Maulvi Fazalul Haq, the Quit India Movement by the Congress and the formation of the Interim Government. It is surprising that there is no letter in this collection dealing with the Lahore session of League except one which refers to the film of the session.

It has been argued that the way Jinnah compelled the three Muslim League Chief Ministers and some other leaders to resign from the National Defence Council signified the total domination of the party by Jinnah in 1941. Sir Sikander Hayat Khan, the then Chief Minister of Punjab, Maulvi Fazalul Haq, the Chief Minister of Bengal and Sir Saadullah, Chief Minister of Assam were the three Muslim leaders who did not owe their positions to Jinnah. The three Chief Ministers were compelled to resign from the National Defence Council under threat of expulsion from the Muslim League. This removed any possible challenge to the leadership of Jinnah from any other Muslim leader. In fact Maulana Hasrat Mohani had protested in the Allahabad session of the Muslim League against investing Jinnah with dictatorial powers.



The Punjabi Muslim leaders were never comfortable with the programme of the Muslim League. Sir Sikander Hayat Khan, although he had drafted the Pakistan Resolution at Lahore, later alleged that his original draft had been radically amended before presentation to the Lahore session. Punjabi Muslim leaders were in favour of a federation and not two 'independent states' of the Lahore Resolution. Sikander Hayat Khan's dissidence was partly provoked by Jinnah forcing him out of the National Defence Council. Jinnah had signed an agreement with Sikander Hayat Khan in 1935 that while the latter would follow the Muslim League in all India matters the former would not interfere in Punjab affairs.

In Bengal Maulvi Fazalul Haq had also been annoyed by the fiat of Jinnah asking him to resign from the National Defence Council. He also like Sikander Hayat Khan did not like Jinnah's interference in Bengal politics. He was the leader of the Proja Party and was not a member of the Muslim League when he became Premier of Bengal. He joined the Muslim League later. He developed differences with the League and did not join the Muslim League legislature party. He was expelled from the League and formed the government with the help of Shyama Prasad Mukherji. Interestingly, it was he who had proposed the famous Pakistan Resolution at Lahore.

The political atmosphere of the period can be gleaned from the fact that the League leaders were making the most fantastic statements. For example Liaquat in a speech at the Aligarh Muslim University alleged that the Quit India Resolution of the Congress Party in 1942 meant the annihilation of the Muslims of India (p. 223).

The collection is a good source book for researchers and students of that important period in the history of India.

Eqbal Ahmad had been a well known scholar and a political activist who participated in the anti-colonial movement in Algeria, and in the popular movements against wars and colonial oppression elsewhere. He wrote extensively on the problems of the Third World and on war and peace. The collection under review is divided into four parts. They are the postcolonial state; the shape of Pakistan; a sense of place; and the war at home.

Eqbal Ahmad argues in the first section that the Third World countries are facing political, social and economic revolution which has involved a majority of the people in a way which is unique in history. The success of a regime is to be judged by the economic growth which serves to satisfy demands for distributive justice; and the new institution must be instruments not only for mobilization and control but also of accountability.

The second section of this collection deals with the nature and character of the movement for Pakistan and the deviation from the

One may sometimes differ with Eqbal Ahmad s' analyses but the wide sweep of his vision, his assessment of the political, social and economic problems of the Third World countries, his analyses of the problems of Pakistan and rise of militant Islam in the country and elsewhere deserve attention.

original ideas which promoted that movement. Eqbal Ahmad says that Jinnah is an enigma of modern history. His aristocratic English life style, Victorian manners, and secular outlook rendered him a most unlikely leader of Indian Muslims. He goes on to compare him with Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. Azad's ancestors belonged to the Persian and Urdu speaking aristocracy of India. His family had migrated to Madina in the aftermath of the war of 1857. His mother was the daughter of a renowned scholar of his time. His father had written a ten volume work on Islam. Azad himself was born in Mecca, was fluent in Arabic, Persian and was the most gifted writer of Urdu prose. According to Eqbal Ahmad he was steeped in the mystical tradition of Islam. Jinnah and Azad stood in sharp contrast to each other. Azad was a Sunni while Jinnah belonged to the minority Shia community. Jinnah according to Eqbal Ahmad was a prototypical westernized Indian, tutored in Lincoln's Inn, tailored at Seville Row, a constitutionalist Barrister in the Anglo Saxon tradition, married to a Parsi woman. He was more at home in English than in his native Gujarati, spoke little Urdu and knew neither Persian nor Arabic, and had only rudimentary knowledge of Islam. What then was the reason for the popularity of Jinnah among the Muslims? This question has intrigued many scholars of Muslim politics of that period. Eqbal Ahmad's attempted answer to the question is not very clear. He quotes Professor Zaidi, the compiler of Jinnah's Papers that Jinnah differed from other Muslim leaders in so far as he was uncompromisingly committed to substance than to symbol, reason rather than emotion, modernity rather than tradition. If these were the reasons for the popularity of Jinnah then how would one explain the popularity of the Khilafat movement in the twenties which was only a symbol by that time, and which appealed to the emotions and tradition?

Similar ambiguity exists about Jinnah's commitment to democracy as against theocracy. It is very common to cite Jinnah's speech at the inaugural session of the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan on 11 August 1947 where Jinnah had held out a vision of an almost secular state in Pakistan. But before and after the inauguration Jinnah repeatedly stated that Pakistan's constitution would be based on the essential principles of Islam and further that it was mischievous to allege that it would not be based on the Shariat. Eqbal Ahmad cites Jinnah himself where he said 'let us lay the foundation of our democracy on the basis of truly Islamic ideals and principles'. The big question was who would interpret truly Islamic ideals and principles? The truly Islamic ideals and principles as understood by Qazi Husain Ahmad and Mulla Umar (the Taliban supremo) were different from those of Jinnah. Eqbal Ahmad himself cites a letter to him in which the writer said that it was not true that the Muslim masses instinctively chose progress and democracy against theocracy, because the 1946 election, which was a referendum on Pakistan, was won on the cry of 'Islam in danger'. The letter writer claimed that the dilemma of two horns, one represented by the liberals and the other by the Ulama was Mr Jinnah's contribution to Pakistan.

The role of the Army and bureaucracy in Pakistan have received Eqbal Ahmad's attention. This is but natural as these two institutions have ruled that country for most of the period since the inception of Pakistan. According to Eqbal Ahmad bourgeois soldiers and bureaucrats of British vintage ruled the country from 1947 to 1971. Their primary concern was the preservation of the status quo. They were against democracy and also against politicians. Gradually the old class of officers was replaced by the people of petit bourgeois origin and fascistic outlook. Later the balance of power shifted in favour of the army against the bureaucracy. The army now comprised the middle peasant, small landholder, or urban middle class families. The army, according to Eqbal Ahmad, proud of its traditions and convinced of its quality had since independence suffered agonizing setbacks in its wars in 1948, 1965, and 1971. Bureaucracy had over the years particularly during the five years of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's rule began to lose its *espirit de corps*. Bhutto and the successive regimes packed it with non-professionals and political elements.

According to Eqbal Ahmad military intervention in politics would be ruled out only when legitimacy of the civilian system of power is established over a period of time; when the principles of governance as embedded in the constitution, laws, and convention of contemporary statehood are observed by governments and politicians; and when civilian system of power is regarded by citizens normatively as just, appropriate, and authoritative.

Eqbal Ahmad's analysis of the Kashmir dispute is interesting but fails to understand the Indian point of view. His critique of Pakistan's Afghan policy has been borne out by the recent history of that benighted country. He believed that the Taliban was the most retrogressive political movement in the history of Islam. He had rightly pointed out more than a decade ago that for Pakistan there was still time to help avert the disasters that are likely to accrue from the Taliban's domination of Afghanistan.

Writing almost ten years ago about Karachi, the author had remarked that during one week many more people were killed and wounded in Karachi's civil war than in Kashmir. He had said that with the killing and dying continuing in Karachi, Pakistan leaders' rhetorical flourishes on Kashmir sound banal to ears native no less than foreign. Analysing the roots of sectarianism in the country Eqbal Ahmad points out that Pakistan's is an ambiguous polity; here, political paeans to Islam have served as the compensatory mechanism to the ruling elite's corruption, consumerism and kow-towing to the West. As a result militant Islamic minority keeps an ideological grip on the morally insecure and ill formed power elite.

One may sometimes differ with Eqbal Ahmad s' analyses but the wide sweep of his vision, his assessment of the political, social and economic problems of the Third World countries, his analyses of the problems of Pakistan and rise of militant Islam in the country and elsewhere deserve attention.

Across the Wagah has come out of Maneesha Tikekar's stay in Pakistan in connection with a research fellowship granted to her by the Ford Foundation. The volume shows that she has put her stay in that country to admirable use. It was her first visit to that country and it was natural that she as an Indian had many preconceived notions and even prejudices about Pakistan. Maneesha Tikekar coped with these problems with aplomb and has produced a very interesting study of Pakistan.

The first part of the book deals with her visit to various cities which introduced her to the society, culture and institutions of Pakistan. It became obvious to her that Pakistan is not a homogenous country and that there is wide ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity. The second part of the volume is devoted to the tumultuous political history of Pakistan. In this part Maneesha Tikekar has gone over the history of the birth of the new nation amidst controversies and turmoil of communal strife. She has drawn in a broad sweep the early years of the new country, its trials and tribulations. The inability of the political elites to frame a constitution and their failure in nation building has been analysed. The emergence of the military in the power structure and its baleful effects on the political developments and progress of the country has been highlighted. Maneesha Tikekar then goes over the factors that led to the emergence of Bangladesh. The author has given a detailed account of the Islamization drive by General Ziaul Haq which included the laws which seriously affected the minorities, women and the Ahmedya community after his military coup in 1977.The Musharraf coup in 1999 and the following political developments have been discussed in detail.

Maneesha Tikekar in the next section of her book analyses the various factors that have influenced the politics of Pakistan. They are Islam, the Army, the U.S, and Afghanistan. Islam was a factor of legitimization, national identity and concern for security mainly from the perceived threat from India. The author goes into the various dimensions of Islamization. She has quoted the well known speech by the founder of the Pakistani state Mohammed Ali Jinnah on 11 August 1947 to assert that he visualized a modern, progressive and a secular state. She points out the growth of the religious parties in Pakistan ever since the beginning of General Ziaul Haq's rule. She points out that the Quranic concept of Jihad has been abused by the Ulama, exploited by the army and used by the state as a tool of foreign policy. The origins of the sectarian conflict has been analysed in some detail by the author. The controversy about the role of Madrassas in the growth of the Jihadi ideology has also received the attention of the author. Maneesha Tikekar has rounded up her study with an interesting chapter on Pakistani perceptions of India. According to her an average Pakistani perceives India as a Hindu state. In his opinion India's secularism is a sham, at best an eyewash. There is a tendency to view an Indian from the inherited memory of Partition riots. A Pakistani has rarely an opportunity to meet a Hindu in his life time. More often their knowledge of Hindus is taken from highly coloured and biased books. Most Pakistani do not like Indians stressing the commonality of culture of the two countries which is taken by them as a denial of their separate identity.

Maneesha Tikekar's book is a good introduction to Pakistan about which much disinformation and misperception exists in India.

Tahir Jahangir's interesting introduction in *A Travel Companion to the Northern Areas* which are in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir and some other spots in Pakistan is almost a tourist guide to the magnificent territory. The author's hobby is travel and landscape photography and therefore, he is fully qualified to write with authenticity and admiration about the various spots in the area. The book comprises travel details of Gilgit and Hunza, Nanga Parbat, Chitral, the Swat Valley, the Kaghan Valley, Mansehra Valley, Neelam Valley and Parchinar. For every important trek the author provides all the details about the distances involved, the accommodation available and so on. He does not ignore the problems of security in some of the areas where he advises to arrange for security, otherwise not to stray far from the main roads. Most of the areas described are located deep in the inaccessible Himalayas where means of transport are scanty and roads are underdeveloped. However, the beauty of many of the places compensates for the trouble taken to reach there. In many places the author becomes almost poetic in his descriptions, "The sun was about to set behind the mountains surrounding us and we were keen to pitch our tents and get a fire going for dinner. We found a beautiful spot with a view of Nanga Parbat and a stream flowing close by, 'Fairy Meadows' is all that is it is reputed to be; undulating slopes, thickly wooded and as yet spared by the timber merchants. Banks of flowers were criss-crossed by little streams tinkling their way down the mountain slopes to the Raikot River 1,500 feet below." At another place describing the night scene by the side of a lake called Saiful Maluk in the Kaghan Valley the author writes, "The wind rose and the lake water reflected the moon in a million small ripples. It was as if the lake was alight with countless little candles floating on its surface. Then the slip steam would calm a portion of the lake surface casting a dark shadow, cutting across the sea of candles."

The author has described the life styles and traditional cultures of some of the communities living in these far flung mountain habitations. The book is a useful guide to those who wish to travel to some of the most beautiful spots in this part of the world.■

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Viewing With Two Lenses

Peter Ronald deSouza

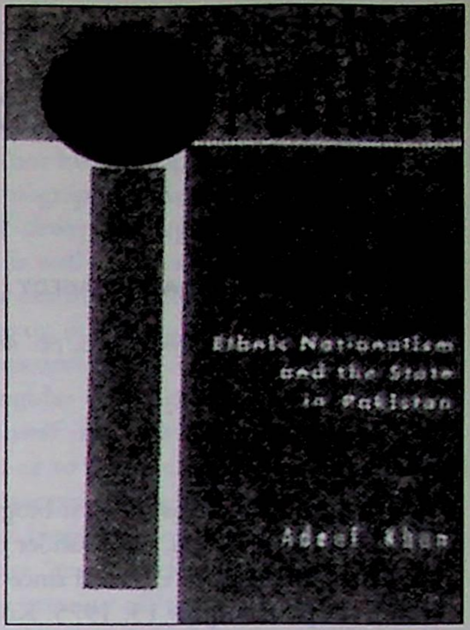
ALIVE AND WELL IN PAKISTAN
By Ethan Casey
Penguin Books, India, 2005, pp. 269, Rs. 275.00

POLITICS OF IDENTITY: ETHNIC NATIONALISM AND THE STATE IN PAKISTAN
By Adeel Khan
Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 212, Rs. 295.00

The two books under review here should not really be discussed together since they belong to different genres. *Alive and Well in Pakistan* is classified as a travel/ current affairs book, full of observations, episodes, and encounters with people and places in Pakistan by Ethan Casey a journalist who relishes his role as a latter day chronicler. The *Politics of Identity*, in contrast, is positioned as a political science study of identity politics and nationalism in Pakistan, an excursus through the aspirations, denials, challenges and resistances of the various ethnic groups in Pakistan, by Adeel Khan who has converted his doctoral study into a book on contemporary nationalism. Technically, therefore, a joint review is impermissible.

Yet one could perhaps turn this coincidence of receiving both books for review into a virtue, an opportunity to offer some reflections about differences in the way we see and the way we record what we have seen. All accounts of a place and a people are, in a sense, travelogues since they are all, at best just brief encounters with the human society that the author is visiting, just limited glimpses of a complex and multilayered reality. All authors can therefore only present snapshots of this reality, offer only fixed and superficial frames of the subtle and diverse ways in which human beings organize their collective life. The difference between the accounts is only of form and of the protocols within which each is located. Yet differences of protocol are important since they place differing demands on the author, in some cases stringent, in some cases lax. These protocols require the author's claims to go through certain quality checks before it can pass muster. The intrinsic limitation of all scholarship is that it can offer only a one-sided view of reality. If all accounts are a mirror to reality then the quality of the mirror becomes important. In the old days mirrors from Czechoslovakia were considered the best, because the glass they used had more lead in it and that made it clearer.

By this distinction the travelogue is least bound by protocols. It can be impressionistic, and anecdotal. It can work on the assumption that the author's truth is not subject to disciplinary scrutiny or peer review. It can devote many pages to descriptions of people and habitats pretending to be part novel, part social science. A travelogue's strength lies in that it is relatively unbound. But even travelogues must engage not just the reader, but also the history, culture, politics and social mores of the place. Perhaps even the geography. By these accounts *Alive and Well in Pakistan* is disappointing. It begins promisingly by distancing itself from the 'us-them' model adopted by many commentators who visit new places, and thereby steers clear of either Orientalism or Chauvinism, but having gained an advantage does not press this home to provide the ethnography that travelogues can provide. The book in the early part attempts a dialogue with V.S.Naipaul, through his various writings especially *An Area of Darkness*, but does not really exhibit any engagement with the soul of the subcontinent, as Naipaul does. The book is in two parts, the first is on his travels in Kashmir, both Pakistan and Indian, and the second is on his travels in the other regions of Pakistan. It is on the first that I shall focus. Kashmir is a divided land. It is a division that is mired in a troubled history and that has no easy political solutions. Indian readers have a distorted nationalist lens through which they see the Kashmir imbroglio. As do Pakistani readers. Casey could have used his special location, as an outsider, to complicate both lenses but he does not and what we get instead is a skewed story. If the brutalities visited on the ordinary people of Kashmir by the Indian army should be discussed in detail, as he does, and it must, the brutalities of the extremists finds no mention. If Kasmiri Muslim families, divided by the politics of the border between India and Pakistan in Kashmir, evoke sympathy, as they should, then Kashmiri Pandits displaced by religious terrorists in the valley should also merit humanitarian concern. Travelogues may choose to be innocent of politics. But if they choose to engage with the political then they should not be naïve. *Alive and Well in Pakistan*, on the Kashmiri issue, displays such naivete.



The study by Adeel Khan, in contrast, offers a more insightful account of the play between the Pakistani State and the various ethnic groups of Pakistan. The study very valuably devotes entire chapters to the Pukhtun, Baloch, Sindhi, and Mohajir aspirations against the dominant groups that control the Pakistani state and in doing so give a non-specialist reader a useful introduction to the problems of the people and to their demands. To those of us who are interested in the politics of the subcontinent the challenge of the Baloch, for example, poses inconvenient facts about the two nation theory that was the basis of Pakistan's founding. This book, in fact, offers a scholarly counter to simple-minded clash of civilizations theorists who see Islam as undifferentiated and who then argue for tensions along spurious civilizational faultlines. *Politics of Identity* presents us with not just an account of the ethnic tensions within a Muslim nation in the process of state formation (perhaps more appropriately a Muslim polity which could be argued to be many nations) but also the tensions between ethnicity and religion. Indirectly it is an affirmation of the argument that pluralism and diversity should be constitutive principles of a modern polity East or West, North or South. The weakest sections in the book are the first two chapters which are some attempt to give the book a theoretical frame. Here we can see the protocols of a doctoral study at work where a bibliographical survey is *de riguer* and hence the work must demonstrate a familiarity with the literature. Khan covers the literature on nationalism but does not develop from this a convincing conceptual framework of understanding the nationalism of the Pakistani State. In that sense these chapters do not connect well with the succeeding chapters. This however does not detract from the book's contribution to taking forward our understanding of state formation and identity politics in South Asia.■

Yet differences of protocol are important since they place differing demands on the author, in some cases stringent, in some cases lax. These protocols require the author's claims to go through certain quality checks before it can pass muster. The intrinsic limitation of all scholarship is that it can offer only a one-sided view of reality. If all accounts are a mirror to reality then the quality of the mirror becomes important.

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The Life and Death of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman

Fakrul Alam

SHEIKH MUJIB: TRIUMPH AND TRAGEDY
By S. A. Karim
The University Press Limited, 2005, pp. 407, Tk. 500.00

This, surprisingly, is the first biography in English of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the founder of Bangladesh, even though more than 30 years have passed since he was assassinated in a bloody military coup on August 15, 1975. Known to most Bangladeshis as Bangabandhu, or friend of Bengal, a title bestowed on him by acclamation in a mammoth public meeting in Dhaka on 22 February, 1969, he was truly a man of the people, someone who had made the cause of his countrymen and women his own through endless trials and tribulations. And yet he had been assassinated in the country he had championed ceaselessly soon after it became independent. Also, he had disillusioned quite a few people in record time in governing it. How did he win the hearts of his people as "the father of the nation" and secure a place in their history as Gandhi did in India or Jinnah did in Pakistan? What caused him to slide in their esteem? But also, what was he like as a human being as well as a leader? And now that three decades have passed since his death, is it possible to arrive at a real estimate of the man and his achievements?

It is to S. A. Karim's credit that he has tried to raise these questions implicitly and explicitly and answer them succinctly and objectively in his biography, *Sheikh Mujib: Triumph and Tragedy*. Drawing on published sources, a few interviews with people who knew Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, his own encounters with him as the first Foreign Secretary of independent Bangladesh, Karim has striven to give a balanced, accurate, and thoughtful portrait of the man. His conclusion is that he was a leader whose triumph was on a heroic scale but whose ending was, at the very least, tragic.

Karim begins his biography by providing us with the background to Mujib's rise to fame, the Partition of India, and the rise of the Muslim League. He was barely twenty years old in 1941 when he first encountered Fazlul Haq, the Chief Minister of Bengal, and more importantly, Shahid Suhrawardy, the Minister of Commerce, when they visited Mujib's hometown Gopalganj, then in the district of Faridpur, for a public meeting. He was immediately drawn to Suhrawardy's brand of politics and Kolkata, where he became a student of Islamia College. Here he began to attract attention as a Muslim League activist, working indefatigably to rally Muslim students of the region to work for Suhrawardy's faction of the party, which, ultimately, joined the movement for Pakistan. After Partition, Mujib relocated to Dhaka, but found himself becoming increasingly alienated from the conservative politicians of the Muslim League who had arrogated power in East Pakistan. Inevitably, he became involved in the movement to establish Bengali as a state language of Pakistan, and the movement in turn led to the creation of the Awami Muslim League. Courting arrest repeatedly, and resorting to hunger strikes time and again when in prison, Mujib immediately became prominent in East Pakistan because of his continuous and principled opposition to the communal and feudal politics of the Muslim League. In quick time, he became the General Secretary of the increasingly secular Awami League (it dropped "Muslim" from its name in 1955), and a minister of the United Front government that drove the Muslim League from power in the provincial elections of 1954.

From this point onwards, there was no stopping Mujib, except by confinement in jail. As Pakistani politics became more and more the preserve of the military, as the military conspired with a few West and East Pakistani politicians and bureaucrats to deprive Pakistan of democracy, and as the numerically superior Bengalis of East Pakistan found themselves increasingly thrust out of power, Mujib was in the thick of the action to wrest back the rights of his people through a secular, organized, and democratic movement, even as a succession of military generals attempted to rule Pakistan through martial law. In and out of jail in the latter half of the 1950s and throughout the 1960s, Mujib became convinced that Pakistan was a dead end for his people and that a way out of the clutches of the military-bureaucraic coalition that was ruling Pakistan at this time was needed urgently.

In his desperation, Mujib even thought of seeking the help of India. Karim suggests that it could have been his admiration for Subhas Bose that led Mujib to take a secret trip to Agartala in January 1963 where he met Satindranath Sinha, the Chief Minister of Tripura, to see if Indian assistance would be forthcoming for a separatist movement. But according to Sinha, whom Karim quotes without citing the source, Nehru was not interested and the trip was inconsequential. It is ironic, then, that it was for a trip to Agartola that he never took that the Pakistani government would try him for treason in what has come to be known as the Agartola Conspiracy Case in 1967. Unfortunately for them, the effort at concocting a conspiracy backfired, for not only were they unable to sustain their case in front of the special tribunal that was set up for the purpose, they were also forced to release Mujib in the face of the increasingly violent agitation against them in both wings of Pakistan. Indeed, the Pakistani dictator of the period, Ayub Khan, was forced to resign, and Mujib left the jail triumphantly in 22 February 1969, widely acknowledged by this time in his part of Pakistan as the man most suited to lead it forward to autonomy and prosperity.

The next two years saw Mujib at his best: inspiring his people through fiery speeches in countless meetings, seemingly inexhaustible energy, and an indomitable will. He kept highlighting his party's demand for complete autonomy in East Pakistan until the message went home: in the elections held in December, 1970, the Awami League won 167 of the 169 seats in the province. But Mujib, committed to negotiations through democratic channels, was mistaken in his assumption that the Pakistani generals and Zulfiquer Bhutto, the clear winner in West Pakistan, were going to hand over power to his party merely because it had a clear majority when it was bent on getting the maximum autonomy conceivable for East Pakistanis.

In fact, Yahya Khan, the general who replaced Ayub Khan, colluded with Bhutto to postpone the March 3, 1971 opening of the National Assembly. The result was a spontaneous and angry civil disobedience movement in East Pakistan which, in effect, negated the Pakistani state, making Mujib the *de facto* ruler of East Pakistan. As if to show that he was worthy of the part, Mujib gave what is undoubtedly his finest speech to his people on 7 March, stopping just short of independence, but claiming self-rule in almost all matters. Yahya Khan's response, once again was to scheme with Bhutto, and make a show of negotiations, bent as they were on keeping West Pakistan dominant in deciding the future of Pakistan. And so Mujib and his party kept negotiating with Yahya and Bhutto in good faith, even as the Pakistani army prepared themselves for a crackdown that would decisively and brutally neutralize Mujib and his party and ensure perpetuation of their hegemonic rule.

The date on which the Pakistani army moved to destroy Mujib and thwart the Bengali desire for complete autonomy was the night of March 25. As far as Karim is concerned, Mujib and his party leaders had "ignored signs of the gathering storm" and thus an unsuspecting, unprepared people were brutalized, the movement for autonomy stunned, and Mujib himself captured. Here again Karim is critical of Mujib's decision to let himself be arrested to deflect the Pakistan army from wreaking havoc in his country, Mujib, reportedly, told his followers who wanted him to flee, "If I leave my house (Pakistani) raiders are going to massacre the people of Dhaka. I don't want my people to be killed on my ac-

count", but his decision did not prevent genocide; on the contrary, it exposed his people to the wrath of the Pakistan army.

While the Pakistani army went on the rampage, Mujib himself was taken to prison in West Pakistan where he underwent a trial at the end of which he was found guilty of trying to break up Pakistan and was awarded the sentence of death by hanging. Meanwhile, Bengali troops who had defected, political activists of various parties, and students and refugees who had fled to India came together to organize a guerilla campaign against the Pakistani army and to launch a war that would liberate their country. Inevitably, India was drawn into the conflict, and on December 16, 1971, the Pakistani army in East Pakistan surrendered in Dhaka to the combined Indian and Bangladesh forces. This was how Bangladesh was born after nine blood-soaked months. With the Pakistani army in disgrace, and Bhutto calling the shots, and in the face of international pressure, Mujib was released from jail and flown back to Dhaka via London in an RAF plane on 9 January 1972.

Mujib's homecoming marked the most triumphant moment of his career as a politician who had worked steadfastly and wholeheartedly for his people. But the next few years saw him sliding in popularity and having a torrid time coping with the innumerable problems facing a poor nation that had been denuded for over two decades by the West Pakistanis and that had haemorrhaged steadily for nine months. The prescriptions that he got from his advisers in the Planning Commission, inclement weather conditions that led to a terrible famine in 1974, rising global oil prices, growing lawlessness, his unwillingness or disinclination to be firm with party men and women and relatives who were clamouring for benefits and sinecures, underground movements that appeared to be gathering momentum and threatening the state, all appeared to conspire to show Mujib as unable to cope with the responsibility of steering a nation from political independence to peace, stability, and prosperity.

The stage was set, in other words, for triumph to turn into tragedy. The man who had staked his life repeatedly for democracy now attempted to create a one party state, proscribe newspapers, and stifle dissent. A radical leader died mysteriously while in police custody. Members of Mujib's extended family suddenly began to assume more and more power. People who had shown total devotion to him and Bangladesh like Tajuddin Ahmed were dropped and sycophants were promoted to important positions. The air in Dhaka was rife with rumors of conspiracies and coups but Mujib chose to ignore them, convinced that the people he loved and who had been ready to die for would never harbour conspirators against him. And so it was that he rendered himself completely vulnerable and was murdered by some adventurous, resentful, and ambitious military men in the early hours of August 15, 1975.

Karim's verdict on Mujib's rise to fame and the darkening world in which he died and his assessment of his subject's personality, career and contribution to Bangladesh is undoubtedly sound. His Mujib is a gracious and compassionate person, generous almost to a fault. His love for his people and willingness to sacrifice himself for them is never in doubt. He had more or less "single-handedly" spearheaded the movement for Bangladesh in its climactic phase and until his incarceration in 1971. And he had struggled to cope with extremely difficult situations the best he could till desperation forced him to adopt undemocratic measures. He was, in short, a "tragic hero" flawed and yet great and even grand.

S.A. Karim's *Sheikh Mujib: Triumph and Tragedy* seems to have been written at leisure; the consequence is that it is even-paced, well-organized and sedate. He strives to be balanced and objective in his presentation and he writes out of a conviction that as a biographer he must be committed to presenting his subject truthfully and adequately. He has also tried to come up with a book that will be read by many and to that end he has decided not to overload it with "notes and references".

It must be said though that Karim's book is not the "comprehensive biography" he claims it to be in his Preface. For one thing, he spends far too much time sketching in the background and often loses sight of his subject in dealing with the historical contexts. At times, a few chapters might go by without any reference to Mujib and in scores of chapters he makes only a fleeting appearance. Indeed, one may occasionally even be misled into thinking that one is reading a political history of Bangladesh where Mujib is the main actor and not his biography. Moreover, Karim appears not to have realized that a biographer's task includes looking at archival material and contemporary newspaper reports and tracking down unpublished written sources as well as perusing published books and documents. He could have, for example, tried to include excerpts from the many speeches Mujib gave on public occasions that have been surely recorded in parliamentary proceedings.

But what appears to be the singular defect of this biography is Karim's reluctance to imagine himself into positions, crises and situations Mujib had to negotiate or to come close to his subject through what Keats had once characterized as "negative capability". In his introduction to his brilliant biography of Samuel Johnson, James Boswell had claimed that the "more perfect mode of writing any man's life" involved "not only relating all the most important events of it in order, but interweaving" it with the subject's words and thought till "mankind are enabled to see him live". In his conclusion, too, Boswell had felt with satisfaction that in his book the character of the great man had been "so developed "in the course of his work "that those who have honored it with a perusal, may be considered as well acquainted with him". Karim follows Mujib from a great distance and almost never allows him to speak for himself. There is little or no effort to see Mujib from up close and there is definitely no attempt to get into his mind. The result is a biography that does not make us "see him live" and think and feel and this is a pity for by all accounts Mujib was a passionate, loving and caring man.

Nevertheless, there is a lot to be thankful for in Karim's *Sheikh Mujib: Triumph and Tragedy*. At the very least, a sensible effort has been made to present the life of a great and generous even if flawed leader; surely others will now follow to give us a more intimate and fuller portrait of the father of Bangladesh and the friend of all Bengalis everywhere.■

Fakrul Alam is Professor of English, University of Dhaka. He has written books on Daniel Defoe, Bharati Mukherjee and Jibananda Das and is on the editorial board of *Jamini*. His book *South Asian Writers in English* was published by Thomson Gale in March 2006.

Book News **Book News**

Babur Nama: A Journal of Emperor Babur, translated from the Chagatai Turkish by Annette Susannah Beveridge, and abridged, edited and introduced by Dilip Hiro, is the earliest example of autobiographical writing in world literature. Set against the turbulent backdrop of medieval history, it paints a precise and vivid picture of life in Central Asia, Afghanistan and the Indian subcontinent.
Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 385, Rs. 350.00

Viewing The Islamic Orient: British Travel Writers of the Nineteenth Century by Pallavi Pandit Laisram argues for a nuanced and hybrid approach to the understanding of the relationship between the West and the Islamic Orient.
Routledge (Taylor & Francis Group), New Delhi, 2006, pp. 253, Rs. 595.00

Neighbourly Concerns

Deb Mukherji

BANGLADESH: TREADING THE TALIBAN TRAIL
Edited by Jaideep Saikia
Vision Books, Delhi, 2006, pp. 272, Rs. 495.00

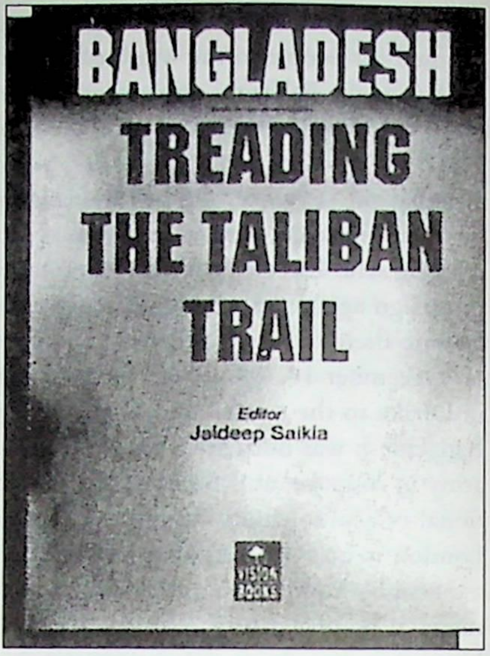
It is encouraging that several books on Bangladesh have appeared in recent months. There have been few publications on Bangladesh in India, and perhaps fewer from abroad, to be seen on the shelves. For India, this is regrettable on two counts. Firstly, we should know more about a neighbour of nearly a hundred and fifty million people whose territory adjoins the most sensitive region of India for over four thousand kilometres, and, secondly and consequently, whose internal developments have an inescapable fall-out on India.

Bangladesh: Treading the Taliban Trail is an important contribution towards understanding some of the major contemporary issues between India and Bangladesh as also some significant internal developments. The title caters to the concern of the day about the growth of Islamic fundamentalism in Bangladesh. But this concession to the need for titles which attract attention should not detract from the intrinsic merits of the contributions which cover areas well outside of what the title would suggest. Of the thirteen chapters in the book, including Saikia's introduction and Habib's contribution in the appendix, several do indeed deal directly or in passing with the question of rising fundamentalism. The majority are, however, on a variety of issues of direct concern and consequence for India. All the contributors have been, or are, professionals in government, uniformed services, journalism or academics with credentials testifying to their knowledge of the subjects under review.

The focused concern of editor Jaideep Sailkia at the increasing sway of Islamic fundamentalism is evident in the introduction. Facts and reportage are quoted to show how the Jamaat and Islamist organizations have been gaining in strength and whose terrorist attacks within the country have gone unchecked. To Saikia's dismay, the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) is repaying the assistance from the Bangladesh intelligence agencies by condoning the rapid illegal migration from Bangladesh to Assam. Saikia is also hurt at the unfair treatment by Bangladesh "to a nation whose soldiers had shed blood to liberate Bangladesh". There is an element of naivete in such expressions, as we see in later chapters as well, with the underlying assumption that gratitude is a factor in relations among nations.

Matthew Aaron Rosenstein ('Superpower and the Imperilled Democracy') looks at Bangladesh from an American perspective and details the problems of governance and corruption and concludes that "these political and socio-economic factors are creating an environment in Bangladesh that is ripe for further upsurges in violence, continued disintegration of law and order, and the growth of radical extremism". Recounting the gradual steps by which Bangladesh has moved away from the principles of secularism since 1971, Rosenstein details the emergence of fundamentalist and terrorist organizations. He suggests that the United States may take a more pro-active view of the terrorism related threats to India from Bangladesh (and Pakistan) and notes with some scepticism the rejection by Bangladeshi officials of "the notion that radical Islamism is a problem in the country...."

Bertil Lintner ('Islamist Fundamentalism in Bangladesh') focuses substantially on the treatment of minorities in Bangladesh and their consequent migration. He also applies a broad brush of historical perspective on the importance of Islam in Bangladesh and the rise of extreme fundamentalist forces. His distrust of the present government's intentions is without ambiguity. Lintner avers the links between military intelligence agencies of Pakistan and Bangladesh and the safe passage and shelter given to *jihadi* elements who had come to Dhaka after the fall of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. In his view, "There is every reason to watch developments in Bangladesh carefully, specially as the present government remains vehemently in a state of denial – which means that it is not going to do anything to stop the spread of Islamic fanaticism and the attacks on the country's religious and ethnic minorities", and whatever action they may take under international compulsions would be cosmetic in nature. It remains to be seen if the series of high-profile arrests in the spring of 2006 of self-confessed terrorists fall under this definition or are meant as serious administrative steps, long overdue.



From Bangladesh, Haroon Habib ('17 August 2005:Milestone of Terror') succinctly recounts the growth of fundamentalism. The needle of suspicion and primary encouragement points again to Pakistan, "who had faced a humiliating defeat in the Bangladesh War of Independence. They started cultivating the Bangladeshi collaborators of the defeated Pakistan army, and entrusted them with the task of revenge". Figures provided by Habib show not only the rapid rise in the number of madrasas, in some of which, at least, *jihadi* culture is inculcated, as also the sharp increase in financial support to them by the state over the past few years.

The issue of treatment of minorities ('Status of Minorities in Bangladesh') is also dealt with by Salam Azad in his brief paper where instances of minority abuse are quoted, particularly during the two regimes led by the BNP. He refers to rape as a conscious instrument of shame to compel Hindus to migrate.

The noted Bangladeshi author, the late Humayun Azad, who suffered a murderous attack at the hands of the fundamentalist JMB, has also brought out this calculated assault on Hindu women in the banned book, *Pak Sar Zamin Saad Bad* ('The Blessed Sacred Land'). But the malaise goes back further in time as seen in Taslima Nasreen's *Lajja* (*Shame*), also banned in Bangladesh, published over a decade ago. As Lintner earlier quotes Amnesty International in its December 2001 report, "None of the governments in Bangladesh since its independence has taken any decisive steps to protect Hindus in the face of potential threats, including the current attacks".

Writing on Indo-Bangladesh relations ('India and Bangladesh:Distant Neighbours'), Mahendra Ved's contribution is fashioned to bear out his opening statement, "Keeping away from India.........guides the basics of Bangladesh's foreign policy". According to Ved, the links forged with Pakistan in the years of cohabitation remain strong and it was an illusion to believe that the difference would be permanent and, hence, the Indian sense of hurt at subsequent developments is misplaced.

While it is true that the nature of Bangladesh's emergence and its polity may have been misunderstood in India (eg. end of the two-nation theory), it would not be correct to conclude that there is much affection in Bangladesh for Pakistan. Pakistani links with certain sections of elite society, the uniformed services and the views of Islamist parties, do not represent the totality of Bangladesh. Bangladesh remembers not merely the horrors of 1971 but also the previous two and a half decades of economic exploitation and stifling of cultural expression. Obviously there are elements who would wish to revive the spirit of 1947 and these are the elements used by Pakistan for its own purpose over the years. In this

context, Ved's conclusion that Zia's institution of "Bangladeshi nationalism" was to demonstrate Dhaka's superiority over Kolkata, a mere appendage of Delhi, is not supported by the comments of the time. Bangladeshi nationalism, as against Bengali nationalism, was to define the nationalism of Muslim Bengal, underplay the linguistic-cultural content and revive the essence of the Lahore Resolution calling for the creation of one or more Muslim majority states out of British India.

There is substance in Ved's conclusion that the bureaucracy brought up in the Pakistani ethos has been a hindrance in promoting cooperative relations between the two neighbours. His conclusion that governments have also been wary in moving forward because of public opinion may need elaboration. The fact is that in Bangladesh it is the political classes who have used public opinion as a bogey. The reality is better reflected in the entirely supportive public reaction to the end of the hugely contentious and sensitive question of division of Ganga waters, the most critical test of bilateral relations till then, by the 30 year treaty of 1996, made possible by the courage and statesmanship of the Dhaka government. It is not that the people of Bangladesh do not want good relations with India, with whom many interactions continue at numerous levels, but that the political classes, often encouraged by external forces and old mindset, have held Indo-Bangladesh relations hostage.

Ved's goodwill for neighbouring countries is apparent, but his recipe of treating them as recalcitrant school children, shared by many, is open to discussion. Such an approach may only encourage the big brotherly attitude that Indians are often accused of. There cannot be parity between India and her neighbours in size or power, but there is parity in sovereignty. Exercise of sovereignty includes responsibility and accountability, and the neighbours, while receiving due respect, have also, equally, to take India's sovereign responsibilities, and accountability for their own sovereign actions, into account.

The issue of Bangladeshi migration to the North-East is clearly a major area of focus of the collection. H.K. Deka's brief article ('Migration from Bangladesh:The Assam Scenario') carries excellent perspective and clarity. One cannot but agree with his conclusion that the area has been drawn into a proxy war by Pakistan. "The ever increasing *jehadi* culture, particularly among the illegal migrants from Bangladesh…..will sound the death knell to not only India's security but its secular character as well". This is a significant analysis in more ways than one.

D.N. Bezboruah's researched article ('Our Land, Their Living Space') on Bangladeshi migration, particularly into Assam, is a telling commentary on the magnitude of the problem and the indifference of both the centre as also state politicians hungry for votes. Extensive quotations from less than significant Bangladeshi journalists or attacks on individual politicians do not add to his argument which is sustained by cold figures.

The fundamental question which has been ignored by the Indian state – consciously so if the IMDT Act is any indication – is that there is demonstrable increase in the number of Bangladeshi immigrants in Assam (as also other states of the North-East, though this has not been dealt with in detail in any of the articles). The question which an Indian citizen from Assam would be entitled to ask the government is what would be the reaction of Amritsar if there were to be an influx from across the border which changed the demographic pattern of Punjab, or if something similar happened in Kerala with an immigrant invasion from Sri Lanka. If such questions sound silly, sillier things continue in India's neglected North-East. The indifference of the central and state leadership which contributed to the merger of Sylhet and Chittagong Hill Tracts in Pakistan in 1947 seems to continue today.

Anasua Basu Ray Chaudhury's contribution ('Gas Export from Bangladesh:A Pipe Dream') on export of gas from Bangladesh has useful data on gas availability and exploration. But the conclusion that Bangladesh should bow to some assumed imperatives and export gas to India is not sustained by the body of the article. It has not been demonstrated that there is sufficient gas for export after adequate quantities are preserved for national use in the coming future, which must be a primary duty of the government. In a collection dealing with security, political and humanitarian issues, one on gas exports appears out of place, particularly as there are other important bilateral questions such as trade, transit and water resources which do not find mention.

General B.K. Bopanna had fought as an officer of the Indian army in 1971 on the East Pakistan front. His dismay ('1971: A Sacrifice in Vain') that Bangladesh is being "pushed by fundamentalism toward the establishment of an Islamist state" is understandable, even if professional soldiers fight as a duty and not in pursuit of emotional or ideological objectives. Two observations of General Bopanna merit notice. His acknowledge-ment that the Mukti Bahini made a significant contribution to the war effort is welcome, for the frequent assumption in India that the war was won only by the Indian army is the other side of the coin where India's role is so often minimized in Bangladesh. The comment "Historically, it was Bengal that had spearheaded racial politics, which eventually led to the birth of Pakistan", may be questioned with regard to detail, but shows an understanding of the contribution of the Muslims of East Bengal to Partition which is missing in the usual north-India centric view of 1947, and thus dilutes our understanding of Bangladesh. Bibhuti Bhushan Nandy ('DGFI: State Within a State') provides useful information about the genesis and the activities of the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI), its reach and influence and its links with its sister organization, the ISI of Pakistan. He also makes quite remarkably pointed charges against individuals in India, some in responsible positions, for being favoured by the DGFI which should normally merit investigation. Subir Bhaumik ('Politics of Sanctuary: Indian Rebel Bases in Bangladesh') has provided a chronology of the support and sanctuary provided to insurgent groups of the North-East by Pakistan and, lately, Bangladesh. In the face of the continuing state of denial by Bangladesh, he suggests that India may have to opt for covert action to neutralize rebel activity being carried out from Bangladesh.

The concluding chapter by I.P. Khosla ('Indo-Bangladesh Relations: A Template for Cooperation'b), a tour d'horizon of Indo-Bangladesh relations, reflects a balanced understanding of the past and the issues presently involved. Khosla suggests a Chinese interest in the non/grant of transit facilities by Bangladesh as this would help greater integration of the North-East with the rest of India. There are areas like trade where India could, he feels, take a more liberal approach. Bangladesh needs to take concrete steps to reassure India on support to insurgent groups and do more to build confidence among the minorities.

Treading the Taliban Trail will be useful reference material for scholars and analysts, even if, or perhaps because, the title is misleading and the canvas covered is much larger than the title. The issue of rising fundamentalism is undoubtedly of critical importance, more so for Bangladesh than India or anyone else, and as Habib writes, "Whatever the present government's political compulsions, the danger of Islamist militancy in Bangladesh is no longer a hypothesis. Although lâte in the day, if the suicidal state that Bangladesh is sliding into is still not taken seriously, it has the potential to destroy the fabric of a traditionally liberal society, and imperil not only Bangladesh, but the region as well".

But if the book promotes understanding of the problems India faces from her eastern neighbour, it does not quite educate the reader about the neighbour itself, which perhaps was not on the menu. The valiant struggle of the Bangladesh media against the threat of fundamentalism, dismissed till the other day as 'anti-national' by the establishment, many landmark judgements which have caused the judiciary to be targeted by terrorists, the remarkable achievements in women's rights, the determination and commitment of cultural activists, despite bombs and threats, to sustain Bengali culture, an active civil society and many other welcome developments, would also need to be known and noted. For only then can we begin to understand the complex polity of a critically important neighbour and not judge it purely by its government and a band of fanatics.■

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India-Pakistan Relations and Pakistan

I.P. Khosla

DIVIDED BY DEMOCRACY
By Meghnad Desai and Aitaz Ahsan, series editor David Page
Roli Books, New Delhi, 2005, pp.144, Rs.295.00

INDO-PAK CONFLICTS, RIPE TO RESOLVE?
By Rizwan Zeb and Suba Chandran
Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, 2005, pp.116, Rs.250.00

PAKISTAN, DEMOCRACY, DEVELOPMENT AND SECURITY ISSUES
Edited by Veena Kukreja and M.P.Singh
Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2005, pp.301, Rs.360.00

POLITICS OF ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN PAKISTAN
By Savita Pande
Shipra Publications, Delhi, 2005, pp.199, Rs.395.00

THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF PAKISTAN
Editors-in-Chief Hafeez Malik and Yuri V. Gankovsky
Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2006, pp.432, Rs.995.00

There are two reasons for the recent upsurge in interest in India-Pakistan relations and the future of Pakistan.

One is the nuclear tests of May 1998, followed shortly thereafter by the dizzying see-saw of the Lahore agreement, which seemed to establish an unusual bonhomie in the bilateral relationship, then a few months later the Kargil conflict with the shadow of nuclear war hanging over it. Then came the Agra summit and, again within months, the buildup along the border which again seemed to threaten war. For almost half a decade this see-saw left even seasoned observers of the relationship wondering whether to expect, just around the corner, a handshake or a set-to.

The second reason is linked. Without Pakistani support of the Taliban government in Afghanistan there could have been no 9/11. And now there is the rise of sectarianism and religious intolerance in parts of both Pakistan and Afghanistan, so one has to wonder precisely in which direction the present tendencies will lead, without, of course, underplaying the importance of the positive trends like the curbs on cross-border and cross-LOC movement in Kashmir.

Of the five books under review two deal with questions pertaining to India-Pakistan relations while the other three are about where Pakistan is going.

Meghnad Desai and Aitzaz Ahsan have written a section each in this second book of the *Cross Border Talks* series, which seeks to improve understanding of the issues that divide India and Pakistan. The attempt by the authors is to understand why India has succeeded in establishing democracy and why Pakistan has found it more difficult. The importance of this is presumably based on the Kantian or liberal argument, which is not specified as such anywhere in the book, that democracies are more peaceful.

Desai argues that Indian democracy owed much to the character of one man – Jawaharlal Nehru – and of the party he led, so that the constitution, which had built-in autocratic tendencies, instead took democratic roots during the seventeen years he was Prime Minister. Thereafter, two forces saved it: that the judiciary was by tradition and practice independent; and, somewhat surprisingly, that the fissiparous tendency of the Congress party, typical of Indian society, prevented any one group or leader being able to assert autocratic rule. So he is able to argue both ways: that the continuation of one leader prevented autocracy; and that the inability of one leader to emerge prevented autocracy. Thereafter democracy deepened. The deepening of democracy happened because of failure on the economic front, so that the jobless, mainly from the lower castes, used their vote banks to capture a share of power. This is quite the opposite of the argument one usually hears nowadays, which is that democracy and development go romping hand in hand within a free market economy, and under the benevolent eye of a liberal philosophy. He ends on an optimistic note, saying that India will continue to be a democracy for the foreseeable future.

Ahsan's view is that there are some essential and primordial differences between India and Pakistan that led to the Partition; the different politics of the two, he suggests, are also due to these differences. They can be summarized in one phrase: the Indus-India divide. Where the feudals of the Indus aided the consolidation of the British Empire, the Indian mercantile and business classes were in competition with them. So it was, for example, that the Punjab became the sword arm of the Empire. As irrigation spread in the Punjab, new lands were brought under cultivation; the bureaucracy exercised control over this process and gained, while the military gained since they were the first to get land. And at independence it was the military and the bureaucracy, which had most power in the Indus. A further series of developments reinforced this. Jinnah, the only person who could have brought democracy, died too soon to do this; the judiciary, time after time, gave legitimacy to military rule; the political parties, in general, failed Pakistan. So the future of democracy looks bleak, with no likely prospect of the military losing its dominant hold on the commanding heights of the political system. With his political sympathies Ahsan's lengthy defence of the Pakistan Peoples Party is to be expected, but one does miss the complete omission of any mention of Benazir Bhutto's encouragement to the Talibanization of Afghanistan and the inevitable effects this had on the polity of Pakistan itself.

Given the wide treatment of the subject the book could have done with an index. The title of the booklet by Zeb and Chandran derives from ripeness theory, a valiant attempt by William Zartman, director of a conflict management programme at Johns Hopkins University and an authority on negotiations and conflict resolution, to build a theory around the moment when the parties to a conflict feel they lose more than they gain by continuing with the conflict. This is called the mutually hurting stalemate (MHS) and lies at the heart of ripeness theory: the parties must realize they are hurting and there is no way out. Zeb and Chandran have made an even more valiant attempt to apply that theory to India Pakistan relations. This is all the more commendable in that it is a joint effort by, as Stephen Cohen says in the foreword, two young and promising scholars from India and Pakistan. That a consensus study on this subject could be at all possible was to be doubted before one saw it.

According to the authors MHS occurred on at least four occasions, starting with the 1966 Tashkent Agreement, the last one being the Agra summit of 2001. They then go on to try and discover two things: why, despite the occurrence of MHS the conflicts were not resolved; and what are, in this background, the chances of success of the peace process that began in 2003-04. The conclusion is that the situation is apparently ripe but needs some 'artificial assistance' to become properly ripe, such as the removal of irritants, the identification of modalities and an emphasis on Kashmir. A final useful chapter contains conclusions and recommendations, things like the need to pursue a rhetoric restraint regime, incorporating track II into the whole peace process, the creation of compartmentalized and insulated dialogues, a focus on process rather than product (which last two have of course always been opposed by Pakistan) and to include the Kashmiris and allow sincere facilitation (which two are favoured by Pakistan and now, perhaps not opposed *au fond* by India). Since MHS is the initiator of a process and does not say what the product would look like, no solutions are offered.

Theoretical frameworks, if not anathema, are not often found useful by those who actually make policy. Yet it can be hoped that this brave volume will be widely read, including by officials, at least for the new thinking that it may generate.

Kukreja and Singh's book of eleven chapters following an introduction by the editors themselves brings together authors from India, Pakistan and the US, on Pakistan's politics, economics, ideology, military, politicians and the bureaucracy. Six of the chapters are previously published articles, three are by the editors and two, by Saleem Qureshi and Lawrence Ziring, were specially commissioned.

The introduction brings out the close link between democracy, development and security issues in Pakistan. This is a variant of the

democratic peace argument which the cross border talks volume (see above) makes into the central, though unstated, assumption of its argument. Military bureaucratic domination has led to ethno-regional polarization in Pakistan, further compounded by religious fundamentalism, violent sectarianism and a collapsing economy. The sense of insecurity vis-à-vis India led to a coercive state apparatus being given priority over the need to create participatory political institutions. Civil society, meanwhile, was enfeebled. Zia-ul-Haq's regime not only reinforced these trends but also gave a new dimension to international drug trafficking and terrorism in India. So the subsequent regimes of Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif lived under the shadow of the military. And Musharraf's 1999 coup takes military authoritarianism even further, with all the consequences that it entails. In a later chapter on the 1999 coup and after, Kukreja concludes that while it would be incorrect to say that democracy has no future in Pakistan; yet it will be quite a few decades before it obtains unshakable roots, and even after that the military will remain central to the power structure.

Qureshi raises the questions of Islamic ideology and the failed state. Islamism, he stoutly asserts, has in reality made no significant inroads in the political culture of Pakistan and the proponents of secular democracy have not lost ground; both assertions are likely to raise quite a few eyebrows. He then goes on to assert, which will raise the eyebrows even higher, that every military coup has strengthened the democratic forces instead of weakening them; the present is to be seen as a balance between the Islamists, the Army and the secular democrats, with no one of them dominating. As for the failed state argument, this is refuted, since the Army has remained a united and cohesive force; anyway the level of security of citizens in Pakistan is no different from Bangladesh or India. There is an interesting section giving the gist of what three leading Islamic leaders had to say about an Islamic state; another on the operation of the Islamic ideology in Pakistan; and a third, even more interesting, on looking for an ideology in Islamic history where force and power have been used rather than ideology by rulers. These three sections make the piece since one cannot take his assertions about Islam and the military and democracy with any great seriousness.

Ziring says the opposite, succinctly outlining the forces driving Pakistan away from the secular, modern nation-state that would forever be open to people of various religious persuasions and towards an Islamic republic. Pakistan was the product of a refugee community identifying with the Jamaat-e-Islami and the Deobandis. The sustained rivalry with India, the loss of Bangladesh and the inspiration of Khomeini's Iranian revolution, further strengthened the Pakistan army's drive to recreate the Islamic state. So now the jihadi culture has become mainstream while the conventional secular political parties have been hollowed out and effectively neutered. The Talibanization of Pakistan remains possible even if it is not quite clear how this will happen.

There is also a comprehensive piece on the performance of Pakistan's political economy during different regimes, with detailed and useful statistics on debt, the defence burden and GDP growth. This is by Kukreja.

The previously published pieces have been fitted into this volume well. They are by Mohammad Waseem on the causes of democratic downslide; Tariq Rahman on language, power and ideology; Ayesha Siddiqa on the political economy of national security; J.N.Dixit on the prospects of South Asian cooperation in the transformed world post 11 September; Satish Kumar on reassessing Pakistan as a long term security threat; and Rajen Harshe on cross border terrorism as a roadblock to peace initiative.

Pande's opening chapter is on the concept and background of ethnicity. With a liberal use of authoritative quotations and references (characteristic of the whole book) ethnicity is defined, its roots described and its emergence as ethno nationalism, the ways in which the resulting conflict potential can be managed, are delineated. Pakistan's ethnic groups and their demands are then described, a theme expanded in the next three chapters on Balochistan, the NWFP and Sind.

The Balochis, some say the oldest inhabitants of the region, have maintained their hierarchical socio-political structure, with the tribal chief in unquestioned control of his tribe as chief executive, legislator and judge. Balochi nationalism has led to repeated upsurges against the Pakistan establishment, followed by brutal suppression by the latter. The Pakhtuns of the North West Frontier Province and their kin across the Durand line have been the focus of international attention ever since a Pakhtun dominated Taliban government in Afghanistan nurtured and allowed the Al Qaeda and 9/11. Pakhtun autonomy has by and large been respected by successive Pakistan governments which have resisted the temptation to exercise greater administrative control in order to solve the problems created by their desire to come closer to their brethren across the border. But now, and this is a quote, Pashtoon nationalism has mutated into a primarily Islamist form. The emergence of the Jiye Sind movement under G.M.Syed is next, along with sections on the Mohajirs and the Seraikis.

The gradual Islamization of Pakistan was accelerated by Zia-ul-Haq, especially after the Soviet incursion into Afghanistan, when he built the military mosque alliance and there was the rise of sectarian militancy. Another chapter describes the law as it impacts minorities. There are several religious minorities in Pakistan like the Ahmadis, Bahais, Buddhists, Christians, Hindus and so on: population figures per the 1990 estimates are given. They all face problems, persecution, a culture of intolerance, bigotry and extremism.

Three things mar this book. First, there is excessive reliance on quotations and references to other published work, to the extent that, on occasion, the author's argument is quite overshadowed. Second, there are typographical errors so numerous that the reading of it becomes troublesome; the editing should have been far more carefully done. Third, the index is sketchy. A whole section on the Seraikis is not included, neither is there any mention of G.M.Syed who is referred to several times in the text. Ayub Khan and Zia-ul-Haq, who ruled Pakistan for longer than any other rulers, and are copiously mentioned in the text, merit only three references each.

The Encyclopedia of Pakistan, the 'first ever' is an interesting venture. Originally written largely by scholars from the Institute of Oriental Studies in Moscow with support from a US university (Villanova), the Pakistan American Foundation and American Institute of Pakistan Studies, it was conceived in 1981 by the two editors, published in the Russian language in 2000 and then translated into English. The translation did more than just change the language: Marxist Leninist jargon, which was mandatory for the Russian edition, was eliminated; each article was reviewed and edited by eminent Pakistani scholars; and a whole new section was added comprising well written articles by known scholars, mostly non-Pakistani, like Ian Talbot, author of the classic *Pakistan: A Modern History* and T.J.Roberts who has written extensively on Pakistan's fauna and flora, but also Akmal Hussain on economic policy and Milly Stoney (on demography, physical geography and tourism), a freelancer for OUP who, it was later asserted, edited the whole volume! In this section there are articles on the dance (a particularly good one by Rumana Husain), on visual arts and on puppetry, but none on music, which would have been a valuable addition. The first part, however, has short pieces on the Qawwali and other forms of music.

The contents are comprehensive, while the liberal or what may be called the leftist leaning is evident and does not mar the information. Apart from history, archaeology, personalities and places and events there are long articles on Urdu literature with coverage of the progressive writers but not of the Islamists, of the Peasant movement and workers movements, but none on the rise of radical Islam; indeed the Islamic parties and movements are covered perfunctorily. This seems not to be the whole story as far as Pakistan in recent years is concerned.

The article on India-Pakistan relations, by the editorial consultant selected by OUP, is somewhat surreal and says for instance that in 1971 it was the Pakistan Deputy High Commissioner's arrest by Indian authorities that 'triggered a flood of refugees to India'. And Indian readers will be disappointed to learn that Russia now values its friendship with India, but not at the expense of relations with China and Pakistan.

Altogether, as a comprehensive reference work on Pakistan, this is worth having.■

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Business of Politics, Politics of Business

Salil Misra

HAJI SIR ABDULLAH HAROON
By Doulat Haroon Hidayatullah
Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2005,
pp. x+347, Rs. 595.00

Haji Sir Hidayatullah Haroon (1872-1942), the subject of the book under review, was a multifaceted man. A successful industrialist, a philanthropist, devout Muslim, a supporter of separation of Sind from Bombay Presidency, and a crusader for Pakistan as an independent Muslim homeland. The biography is rich in details and contains many primary documents, not very easily available to researchers. The book is important for another reason. The works on the Pakistan movement have focused more on Punjab, Bengal and UP, the nerve centres of the movement. The Sind story in all this tends to get left out. Abdul Haroon came from that area, and while talking about his contribution to Pakistan movement the book also gives us a glimpse of the Pakistan movement in Sind. In spite of the fact that the biography is written by Abdullah Haroon's daughter, it is remarkably devoid of any personal details. It is strictly a political biography, not a personal one.

The book is about the life and times of Abdulla Haroon. Given his commitment to the Muslim League led Pakistan movement, it also reaches out to become a story of the Pakistan movement. But it is a story, not of how that movement was, but of how the subject and the author viewed it. It is by no yardstick an objective account of the times both the subject and the author lived in. Doulat Hidayatullah was the joint Secretary of the Sind Muslim League and a founder member of the All Pakistan Women's Association. She was actively involved in the struggle for Pakistan. The book is therefore an 'inside view' of the Pakistan movement and should be read as such.

Haji Sir Abdullah Haroon, an interesting man by all accounts, wore many hats. The three prefixes to his name Haji Seth Sir represent three different facets of his personality. He was a devout Muslim and lived his life by strict Islamic standards. Charity or *Zakat* formed a very important part of his activities. He was a philanthropist to the core. It was his concern for Muslims that motivated him to enter the world of politics. He was also a very successful businessman. This success enabled him to contribute generously to both political and social causes. He was knighted in 1937 and this represents yet another side of his politics and personality. Although Abdullah Haroon joined the Congress in 1917, it was clear that he could not stay for long under any anti-imperialist political umbrella. His was politics of petitioning and not of agitation. He was much more comfortable in the All India Muslim Conference and later the All India Muslim League.

Haji Abdulla Haroon started his life as a street hawker from the pavements of Karachi and, within three decades made it to Victoria Road as a successful sugar baron, exporting sugar to America, England and South Africa. The First World War brought about a new type of alliance between business and politics and as a result many businessmen, traders and industrialists entered politics. So did Haroon Abdullah. His pan-Islamic sentiments drew him towards the Khilafat. It was however with the movement for the separation of Sind that he entered politics in a big way. His zeal to see a separate province of Sind also brought him into the domain of 'Muslim politics'. 'Muslim politics' in the 1920s was a medley of chorus rather than a well orchestrated harmonious tune. There appeared nothing in common between the Congress sympathizers, the government supporters, exclusivists and many others. The political importance of Muslim unity had struck a chord, but along with it came the realization that no such unity existed and could not possibly be taken for granted. Abdullah Haroon was one of those who did not commit themselves to any of the partisan positions, but kept trying hard to bring about Muslim unity. He wrote important letters to leaders like Jinnah and Agha Khan who were then not in India. He also got in touch with important leaders from Punjab, Bengal and UP to try and obtain a consensus on 'Muslim demands' and to construct a Muslim platform in politics.

As the chorus of the 1920s began to gradually develop into some kind of a loose consensus in the 1930s, two things became very clear. One, in the range of available political choices, Congress was beginning to be discarded as a serious option. In the 1920s Jinnah had been closest to this option but he too declared a 'parting of the ways' by the end of the decade. It was clear that other than its members Congress stood thoroughly discredited among various shades of Muslim political formations. Two, the British connection was important but could not be taken for granted. In the perception of many prominent Muslim leaders Abdullah Haroon interacted with, the British were seen as unreliable allies who could never be fully trusted. In their view the alliance with the British was necessary but the leaders would have to maintain and nurture the alliance very carefully. The elimination of the Congress option and the uncertainty attached to the British option tilted the scales in favour of the exclusivist option. This indeed was the trajectory that was followed by Muslim communal politics in the late 1930s and the 40s. This was also central to the politics of Sir Abdulla Haroon.

Abdulla Haroon was a crusader for his Pakistan cause and concentrated all his energies on its realization. However, he did not live to see the fulfillment of the idea he had cherished. Abdulla Haroon died in 1942. Many condolences poured in. One of them, from Liaqat Ali Khan, praised him for being a staunch Pakistani. This was full five years before Pakistan was actually made.■

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A Cultural Conglomerate

Visalakshi Menon

SECRETS FROM THE FIELD: AN ETHNOGRAPHER'S NOTES FROM NORTHWEST PAKISTAN
By Benedicte Grima
Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2005, pp.160, Rs.250.00

The North West Frontier Province and Baluchistan have for long been a source of fascination for outsiders. But few have ventured into the region and spent long years living the harsh lives of the local people in the way that Grima has. The author, an ethnographer who currently teaches Pashto at the University of Pennsylvania, has spent twelve years in Peshawar, the Swat valley, Quetta, Zhob and other adjoining areas.

At the very outset she tells us that Pashto, the language of this region which she mastered, is not just a language but a complex conglomerate of cultural behaviour. "One does not merely speak, but one does, one performs Pashto." As she explains elsewhere in the book, in Pashto, behaviour is rooted in maintaining honour and reputation and the persistent fear of being shamed. Here one would recall that the title of her other book, published in the 1990s, is *The Performance of Emotion Among Paxtun Women*. Since laughter, dancing and singing are considered undesirable activities for women in that region, it is perhaps only through grief or gham that women could express themselves.

The experiences are varied – from life in remote mountain villages where Grima roughed it out with her one year old daughter, to living with an affluent family in Peshawar in the midst of a family wedding. She was constantly chafing at being confined and secluded with the other womenfolk and there were times when she yearned for some male company or to be able to walk out freely into the beautiful landscapes around her – a near impossibility most of the time. But she felt privileged to have been able to enter into and participate in the lives of the Pashtun women, learning to do the *attan*, the traditional dance at the family wedding, balancing pots of water on her head, attempting to make bread, cleaning out the stables and even cutting grass. This resulted in her becoming so well integrated into the local way of life that she was expected to observe all the proprieties of the womenfolk from covering herself with a veil to being careful about where and how she seated herself in a bus.

One of the most hilarious descriptions in this book is of her bus journeys through the barren mountains and passes of the Pashtun and Baluch tribal lands. (Interestingly, she states that she felt more secure and comfortable travelling through these areas which were familiar to her than in Punjab and Sind, where the language and the people seemed so alien.) She tells us that a woman's fate on a bus is a hard one: "She must sit quietly, squeezed in, sweating, possibly vomiting discreetly under the stench of her own veil. She cannot utter a word, turn her head to look at anything, or get up to stretch her legs. If a male relative is not there to cater to her needs, she just remains a noiseless statue glued to the seat until arrival." Grima often found herself having to share a seat with a woman of generous proportions and on one occasion "I was compelled to concentrate with all my energy on just clinging on, grabbing the seat in front for support without touching the man seated in it. I braced myself with one foot stuck out across the isle, taking care not to let my knee touch the man sitting there, trying to nudge myself back on the seat a bit after every sharp turn where I'd nearly fall off." She found that, even under such daunting circumstances, she could establish a rapport with the women, sometimes by asking them if they would like to accompany her to the fields to answer the call of nature. Even that task had to be performed accompanied by a male escort who would stand at a respectable distance away from the women.

The period during which this research was undertaken was also the period of the Taliban's stranglehold over Afghanistan and the narrative is interspersed with accounts of the interface with Afghan refugees. On one occasion, in the house of Yasmin, a young tribal wife in an Afridi hamlet, she was startled at the coldness and indifference towards a tired, starving Afghan woman and her children. It made her realize that "there was a sub layer of rules governing the blanket hospitality that Pashtuns are so renowned for." In another area she stayed with Afghan sharecroppers who were relatively better integrated with the local population. Her descriptions of Aziza a student refugee and Raissa, an Afghan war widow are sensitive and nuanced.

On the whole this is an interesting collection of sketches arranged more thematically than chronologically. As a result places and people who have figured earlier in the narrative reappear, sometimes with the author not realizing that she had referred to them earlier. More careful editing would have helped. While the overall impression that one gets is of a very positive and fruitful interaction with the people, especially the women of this region, one wonders why Grima chose to end on the rather unhappy note that she does, recounting her disastrous attempts at entertaining the local people, in the course of which she was cheated, misunderstood and sharply criticized.■

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City As A Sacrificial Site

Roma Chatterji

CATURMASA: CELEBRATIONS OF DEATH IN KATHMANDU, NEPAL
By A.W. van den Hoek. Edited by J.C. Heesterman, Bal Gopal Shrestha, Han F. Vermeulen and Sjoerd M. Zanen
CNWS Publications, 2004, pp. 188, price not mentioned.

This volume is a posthumous publication of what would have been a part of Bert van den Hoek's *magnum opus* on the ritual structure of Kathmandu. His untimely death, in a road accident in Mumbai in 2001 while on his way to a conference in Pune, put an end to a project that would have covered various aspects of the Newari ritual calendar. A dense monograph that examines the way in which the city of Kathmandu is imaged as a sacrificial arena, this work reflects the best traditions of the Leiden School of Indology.

The festivals of the 'four month' period (*caturmasa, caumasa*) – from the middle of the rainy season to the end of the year – are set apart from other cyclical festivals by their overriding concern with sacrificial death. Unlike other cyclical festivals they are not directly related to the agricultural calendar. The dominant feature of these festivals is the ritual procession or *yatra* that marks out a sacrificial arena – from the center of the city of Kathmandu with the royal palace at Hanumandhoka and the temple of the living goddess, Taleju, to the *pithas* (sacred shrines) which once may have circumscribed the city. As van den Hoek shows, the sacred topography of the city is an ideal type and not empirical reality. It is a product of overlapping perspectives of the dominant religious worldviews in Nepal and of the royal dynasties that have successively shaped the sacred geography of Kathmandu. Thus as the author shows, in the Buddhist, Vajracharya view of the city as a *mandala*, the Kathamandu Valley and the further reaches of the Malla kingdom are all ringed by the overlapping circles of eight *matrka* (goddess) shrines. These shrines are supposed to represent human vices, viz. *raga* (desire), *dvesa* (hate), *moha* (enchantment), *ahankara* (selfishness), *irsya* (envy), *darpa* (pride), *maya* (illusion), and *mada* (intoxication). This circle is without a center since the individual self (purusa) does not exist in the Buddhist worldview. This is in contrast to the Hindu view in which the circle of eight pithas is centred on the temple of Taleju and is referred to as the *Navadurga*.

There is also a ritual division of the city into north and south or upper and lower that is not revealed by an analysis of the sacred texts but is distinguishable in the annual cycle of yatras that make up the caturmasa festivals. The city of Kathmandu is ritually divided into an upper (*thane*) and lower (*kvane*) part, each with its own *thaku juju* (new king). The thaku jujus are kings of the sacrifice and preside over the festivals of the matraka shrines present in their territory, especially that of Indriyana where the thaku juju of thane (upper, north) is concerned and Bhadrakali in the case of the thaku juju of kvane (lower, south). Both of these yatras include the seven other matrkas and circumambulate the whole city. The pattern revealed through these competing yatras is far removed from the orderly schema of the mandala in which each of the matrkas occupies her own space. The yatras reveal a hierarchical relationship between the matrkas but one that is contested. Badhrakali and Indrayani are seen as siblings and their relationship is that of rivalry. The metaphor that dominates these yatras is that of the battlefield in which sacrificial victims are supposed to be taken. As I have already mentioned, all the other matrkas are present as the *gana* of the presiding goddess. However the system does not close with processions of these two goddesses. The kvane juju is also the patron of the shrine of Pachali Bhairava, the consort of Bhadrakali. Pachali Bhairava is worshipped with his lower caste lover and not with his consort. His yatra does not cross the thane-kvane division, instead it touches Hanumandhoka palace at the center of the city and is offered sacrifice. The royal kumari awaits them in the palace to reconfirm the relationship between the central authority and the periphery.

The image of the city as sacrificial space is not confined to the yatras of the peripheral matrka pithas but is also reconfirmed in the Indra yatra – the royal festival par excellence – in which the king is empowered by the central sakti of his realm. As part of the Indra yatra, Kumari, the living goddess, circumambulates the city, but her procession takes place over two nights – one for the northern half of the city and one for the southern half. The king has an ambivalent position as both sacrificer and victim. In the Indra yatra, Indra, the king of the gods, is represented as a captive – guilty of transgression. The image of the captive king in reinforced by the presence of the severed head of Bhairava. The kumari consecrates the king with the royal *tilak* but also views the images of the captive god-kings, thus emphasizing the ambivalence of kingship *per se.* Similarly, in the yatras of Bhadrakali and Dasain (Durga puja) the king exchanges swords with the goddess reinforcing the metaphor of the battle as sacrifice where victory is never certain. However, death is always related to life and regeneration in sacred cosmology. The severed head of Bhairava is a potent symbol of fertility. Tihar, the feast after Dasain, at the turn of the new year, celebrates both the goddess Laksmi, the goddess of wealth and domestic well being and Yama, the god of death. Yama is not received with either sacrifice or mourning but rather represents the presence of death in life itself.■

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Ethnicity, Separatism and Violence

D. Suba Chandran

KASHMIR IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE: DEMOCRACY AND VIOLENT SEPARATISM IN INDIA
By Sten Widmalm
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2002, pp.226, Rs. 350.00

CROSSING THE FRONTIERS OF CONFLICT IN THE NORTHEAST AND JAMMU AND KASHMIR: FROM REAL POLITIK AND IDEAL POLITIK
By Lt Gen V.K. Nayyar (retd)
Shipra Publications, New Delhi, 2005, pp.312, Rs. 650.00

What gave birth to violent separatist movement in Jammu and Kashmir? Could the conflict and violence in Kashmir have been avoided? What role does ethnicity play in conflicts in general and the various conflicts in India in particular? Is Kashmir an 'inevitable ethnic conflict of incompatible identities'? Is Pakistan the cause for militancy in J& K and India's northeast? Is economic deprivation and the suppression of Kashmiris by India a reason for the conflict in Kashmir and also a reason for Kashmiris wishing to join Pakistan?

These are the major questions that Stan Widmalm and Lt Gen V.K. Nayyar attempt to address in their respective books Kashmir in Comparative Perspective and Crossing the Frontiers of Conflict in the Northeast and Jammu and Kashmir. While Widmalm main focus is only on Kashmir, General Nayyar expands the canvass, to include India's Northeast. The fact that one author is an academic from Europe and the other a renowned retired military general provides interesting insights into the same issue from different perspectives.

Widmalm rightly concludes that though Pakistan supported militancy in Kashmir, 'the preconditions and impetus for the separatist movement was created within the state itself'. Nayyar categorically writes – 'confining (Kashmir conflict) to the proxy war will be courting a failure'. Undoubtedly, events since the 1977 elections, considered to be the only free and fair one since independence paved the way for the political upheaval, mainly in the Kashmir Valley. Widmalm sees the 1977 election as the rise of democracy and the subsequent events leading to its fall. It never arose and democracy was never given a chance. Can 1983 be pointed as a beginning of decline of democracy? Events since 1977 had their own momentum – death of Sheikh Abdullah, lack of intra party democracy in the National Conference, the dismissal of Farooq, Farooq-Rajiv Gandhi accord, Jagmohan's tenure as Governor and the 1987 election only consolidated this process. General Nayyar also underlines this aspect and puts it succinctly – 'political ineptness in dealing with J&K has resulted in Kashmiris feeling isolated from the national mainstream and within the state itself'.

But what generally goes unnoticed or under-noticed is that to a large extent the Jammu region and Ladakh completely stayed out of this upheaval then and does so even now. Second, it was during this period that the administrative machinery also broke down by failing to deliver and became a symbol of corruption. Sumit Ganguly's Kashmir in Crisis captures this administrative failure as a reason for the popular discontent, which supported the political upheaval. General Nayyar also delves into corruption in Kashmir and looks into the issue in a historical perspective since the inception.

Poverty and inequality, Widmalm rightly conclude are only a secondary cause for the conflict and violence in Kashmir. Kashmir Valley then and even today is the most prosperous of the three regions in J&K. The standard of living in the Kashmir valley before and after 1989 has been considerably higher when compared to the rest of India. Srinagar, where the political opposition is virulent and open, is the most developed town of the entire J&K state in terms of poverty and underdevelopment. As would be seen from the recent election pattern, Srinagar polled the least, less than ten percent while the rural areas, where poverty and under development could be considered as an issue polled more than forty percent. If these reasons are to form a major factor in political violence, then it should be seen in Rajouri and Poonch districts, the two most underdeveloped and remote areas. The violence one witnesses today in these two districts is not political but militant. There is no popular support to militancy and whatever support the militant groups receive in these underdeveloped districts is out of fear. The fact that there are not many locals in the militant groups from these two economically deprived and infrastructurally underdeveloped districts would question the relevance of this theory in J&K.

General Nayyar looks into another important aspect which remains to be researched even further, especially in the post 9/11 period – the role of radical Islam in Kashmir. He looks into the Islamic resurgence and the growth of fundamentalism since the late 1970s in Afghanistan and Pakistan and their impact on Kashmir. Undoubtedly, the 1979 revolution in Iran, the Afghan Jihad and Pakistan's role in the same along with a search for legitimacy during the 1980s played a crucial role in what is generally perceived as Islamization of Pakistan. Where one would like to disagree with this general phenomenon in the region is when one links the same to Kashmir. Undoubtedly, it shaped the political violence in Kashmir, but did it automatically lead to the religious component of it? Or was/is the religious aspect of violence, generally seen as jihad in Kashmir have its own origin and development?

The religious impact of the above mentioned regional events, in terms of religious and fundamentalist influence in shaping the violent discourse in the Valley came in the mid 1990s and not in the early 1990s or late 1980s. Religious violence has more to do with the Lashkar-e-Toiba and the Jaish-e-Mohammad and less to do with the Jamaat-e-Islami in Kashmir and the Hizbul Mujahideen. To an extent, the attempt to introduce fundamentalism in Kashmir has its own influence and also its own limitations. The fundamentalist campaign is led by the LeT and Jaish, as could be seen from those who carry out fidayeen attacks. The Kashmiri component in these fidayeen attacks is less and the Hizbul Mujahideen, considered being a "Kashmiri" organization has not undertaken such attacks; nor have Kashmiris taken part in these attacks in significant numbers. To a large extent, the fidayeen attacks, which underlines the fundamentalist streak of violence in Kashmir, are carried our mainly by Pakistanis from Punjab and Sind. The Kashmir valley, fortunately till today remains moderate, though there are signs of changes. Both the books miss this important aspect.

What is also interesting in these two books is the way that both the authors look into ethnicity as a factor for the violent movement. General Nayyar considers it as a flexible concept, while Widmalm provides an interesting critique of the major theories of ethnicity. For Nayyar, ethnicity 'permeates beyond the horizon of Kashmiri personality to that of Kashmiri identity'. For Widmalm, 'it is a misconception to believe that political conflicts along ethnic lines necessarily result in a greater degree of inhumanity than others'.

Both books are comparative analyses. Widmalm analyses the Kashmir conflict along with the failure of demand for Dravida Nadu in Tamil Nadu and the exit of separatism in West Bengal. General Nayyar also looks into the various conflicts in India's northeast. Why did the separatist movement fail in Tamil Nadu and West Bengal, whereas there is an ongoing violent movement in most part of India's northeast? How did the Indian Union accommodate the separatist demands in one part and why did they fail in the others? Both these books provide an account of the successes and failures of the Indian Union. Widmalm comparing the conflict in Kashmir with the others in Tamil Nadu and West Bengal concludes 'Class and ethnicity still belong to the same family of political variable. And therefore the Kashmir conflict must not be necessarily seen as a zero sum game…there are political forces even in this conflict that are willing to both negotiate and make compromises.' Nayyar touches on the most important aspect of all conflicts – whether in Kashmir or in India's northeast – 'fifty-six years of democratic governance has resulted only in expansion of government and less of governance.' Therein lies the crux of addressing the conflicts in Kashmir and elsewhere in India.

Widmalm concludes on Kashmir – 'It is possibly the most dangerous conflict because it is the most complicated conflict in the world today'. However, the conflicts in India's northeast are as complicated or even more than that of Kashmir; *and* they are the most understudied from a western perspective. Being most complicated need not necessarily make a conflict the most dangerous. On the other hand, terming a conflict such as Kashmir —the most dangerous actually complicates it further.■

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Presenting A Paradox

Navnita Chadha Behera

EXILE AND BELONGING: REFUGEES AND STATE POLICY IN SOUTH ASIA
By Pia Oberoi
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 298, Rs. 595.00

The Indian subcontinent stepped into its independent nationhood amidst the greatest refugee crisis in the modern era, when an estimated fourteen million people migrated across the borders of India and Pakistan. And yet, a theoretical understanding of the refugee phenomenon has evolved much more recently in the1990s. This is especially true of the International Relations literature in the South Asian region that has been dominated by the neo-realist analyses. This genre of literature has not addressed the refugee question mainly because of their state-centric analysis and excessive focus on power-politics while the neo-liberal approach only addressed the managerial and governability dimensions of refugee problems. The last decade witnessed some critical changes in the discipline though they were largely in response to international developments. As the Cold War unravelled, the conventional categories of analysis became a poor fit to new and much more complex realities. With the eclipsing of the East-West confrontation, the IR scholars were forced to extend the conventional undertakings of security analysis to include matters of economics, migration, identity politics, resources, ecological factors and so on. In the theoretical domain, they were engaged in the third debate between rationalist approaches that included neo-realist and neo-liberal paradigms and reflectivist approaches such as constructivism, critical theories and postmodernism. Pia Oberoi's volume on *Exile and Belonging: Refugees and State Policy in South Asia* belongs to this genre of literature.

Oberoi seeks to distance herself from the neo-realist framework by arguing that the state interests are not "primordially in existence . . . 'given' to the state by the material structure of the international system" and, instead adopts a constructivist approach whereby these interests are "themselves constructed through a process of social construction". This study, accordingly, attempts "to determine why the states of South Asia construct a particular understanding of 'a refugee', and how they communicate this understanding in their policy behaviour." The use of the constructivist approach in this volume, however, remains limited towards understanding the importance of factors such as ethnic affinities among communities cutting across the national borders and the cultural, societal as well as religious norms for explaining the rationale of South Asian states' refugee policies. For instance, it is argued that Pakistan's policies towards Afghan refugees were influenced by the traditions of *Pashtunwali* (the tribal honour code of the Pashtuns) including the concepts of *milmastia* (charity) and *nanawati* (asylum) and the Koranic injunctions of the Muslim faith on the treatment of migrants who forsake their homes in the cause of Allah. The latter element is emphasized more to explain Pakistan's response to "the muhajireen that fled to Pakistan from India" as they were seen to be following the religious tradition of *Hejirah* in Islamic history. Likewise, close cultural and religious linkages between many Indians and Tibetans as well as the veneration of the Dalai Lama in Buddhism and Hinduism, she argues, led to an upsurge in public support for the Tibetan cause, which in turn, shaped India's refugee policies. In the case of Sri Lanka's ethnic crisis and the resulting refugee flows to India, the common ethnic ties between the two countries' Tamil populace are highlighted.

The volume presents a paradox. On the one hand, Oberoi questions the neo-realist assumptions but the discussion throughout the book remains trapped within the statist discourses. This is clearly evident from its structure, which have been "premised on the interaction between refugees and the state at three levels; between the state and transnational refugee protection constituencies, between states in the international arena, and between the state and domestic actors." Thus, the state remains the lynchpin of her analysis. On the other hand, while focussing on the cultural determinants of these countries' refugee policies, she tends to overlook the nationalist, or more appropriately statist aspirations of many of these communities. These included the original dream of a 'Muslim homeland' for the subcontinent's Muslims reflected in the demand for Pakistan in 1947; East Pakistan's cry for Bangladesh in 1971; and the Sri Lankan Tamils' demand for a sovereign and independent Tamil Eelam. The refugees along with their host governments in the latter two cases, for example, involved hosting training camps for the Mukti Bahini and the LTTE respectively that played an important role for realizing or frustrating such aspirations, which have not been discussed.

The strength of the book lies in detailed empirical accounts of the six major instances of forced displacement in the South Asian region including the large population movements at the time of India's Partition in 1947; Tibetan refugees in India; the massive refugee influx from the then East Pakistan to India in the run-up to the 1971 war between India and Pakistan; Afghan refugees who took shelter in Pakistan after the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1979; Rohingya Muslim refugees in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka's Tamil populace who were both internally displaced as well as became refugees in India due to its ethnic crisis which subsequently turned into a civil war. The volume provides a brief historical backgrounder of each conflict by examining the bilateral equations between the key players; foreign and domestic factors especially the socio-cultural influences that shaped their refugee policies as well as issues of refugee management including the provisions for relief, rehabilitation and at times, repatriation. Though Oberoi does not discuss some other prominent examples of refugee crisis such as the Chakma exodus from Bangladesh into India and the internally displaced community of Kashmiri Pandits in India, it makes a valuable contribution.

The book also provides an excellent account of the subcontinent's overall interactions with the international refugee regime especially during the early United Nations debates on the importance of legal protection versus material assistance. Oberoi argues that India and Pakistan's perspectives on the refugee problem was much more holistic as compared to what finally emerged through the statues of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Both Indian and Pakistani representatives, clearly influenced by their own experiences of the Partition, stressed that 'statelessness' was often a lesser hardship than lack of food, clothing, shelter and work. Despite the fact that India as indeed other South Asian states have not acceded to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees or its 1967 Protocol, such moral-humanitarian grounds apart from the legalistic reasoning have continued to provide the rationale of these countries particularly India's refugee policies, especially its commitment to the policy of *non-refoulment*.

From this standpoint, Oberoi's contribution is useful for not only South Asians but also other Third World scholars as it helps in understanding how most of the post-Second World War international institutions including the UNHCR were predominantly shaped by Euro-centric experiences and how the international refugee regime as a whole, was somewhat unresponsive to the Third World needs especially in the early years after its formation. This has significant implications for the current international debates on humanitarian intervention and human security that have been raging in the precincts of the United Nations wherein divergent perspectives continue to emerge from the West and the Third World countries.■

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Reconstructing History

Jasjit Singh

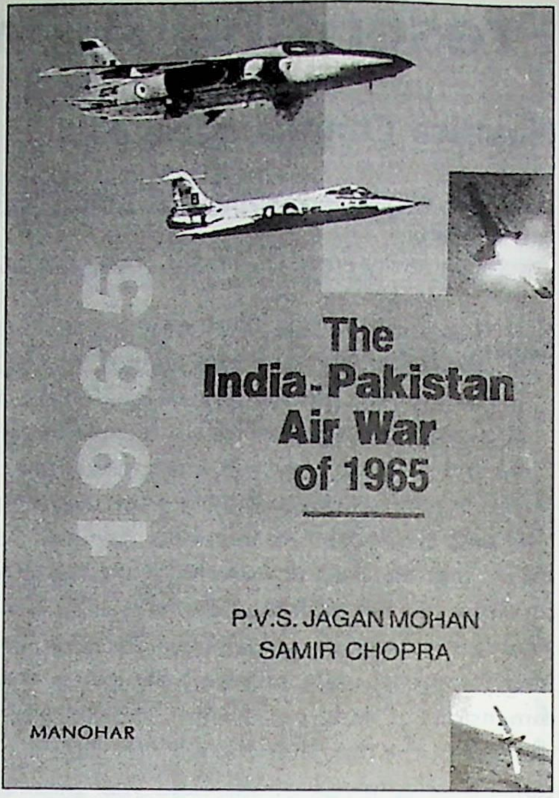
THE INDIA-PAKISTAN AIR WAR OF 1965
By P.V.S. Jagan Mohan & Samir Chopra
Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, 2005, pp.378, Rs. 895.00

This is one of the rare books on air war in 1965 between Pakistan and India reconstructing history from personal accounts, diaries and interviews. Undoubtedly human memory would be hazy four decades after a war; and this is even more so in the case of air wars where the fog of war is normally much thicker than on land or at sea. Getting clear authentic accounts of air wars, therefore, have been problematic. An excellent attempt by two academics makes this book unique, especially when seen in the context of the pathetic official history written by a huge team under the Indian Ministry of Defence.

To begin with, the book destroys a number of myths, the most significant being the assumed outstanding performance of Pakistan Air Force (which Pakistan itself started to believe and suffered on this account in the war six years later). PAF had tremendous advantages over IAF, especially in high-technology weapons and systems like supersonic interceptor and missile firing Sabre Jets, generously supplied by the United States to fight communism. These weapons systems had been fully absorbed through training. IAF, on the other hand, like the Indian Army, was in the throes of rapid expansion trying to recover from the trauma of the 1962 War, it had started to expand from 25 squadrons making to barely 26 by 1965 by spreading its existing aircraft inventory and pilots with vintage aircraft like Vampires in service. Nearly 40% of the combat forces were locked up in the East and not available for use in the West reducing the quantitative advantage of IAF; and above all the full weight of IAF was not applied on the aggressor. Planning parameters based on government directives required conserving forces for a long-duration war stretching over months. Pakistan was also not only better prepared for the war but also held the initiative since it started the war at a time and place of its choice. In assessing the relative performance of the two air forces, the authors make the mistake that others (including India's official historians) have made in assessing the losses in number of aircraft destroyed on either side.

But it is possible to experience low number of aircraft lost if they don't fly and remain protected on the ground! This is why the accepted global norm is to assess the attrition rate, that is, the number of aircraft lost per hundred sorties flown. The attrition rate of Pakistan Air Force losses in the air during the 1965 War worked out to 0.9 percent of the sorties flown compared to 0.6 percent (0.45% if the authors' data is accepted) for IAF. Even at this exchange ratio (which logically should have tilted increasingly in India's favour with the passage of time) PAF would have been in no position to conduct air operations beyond another 2-3 weeks. This is the reason why Pakistan despatched the former air chief, Air Marshal Asghar Khan to China (and Indonesia) within ten days of the war starting to get "urgently required fighter aircraft and the vast complex of weapons, equipment, explosives and spares that support air operations."[1] Indonesia promised MiG-19s and MiG-15s besides other equipment after Asghar Khan gave President Ayub's letter to the Indonesian President saying that he expected Indonesia to help us in our "dire need." Help was also sought from Iran which provided sanctuaries for Pakistan Air Force aircraft, Iraq which actually supplied a dozen F-86s and spares, and from Turkey.

PAF managed to destroy a lot of IAF aircraft on the ground, especially in the early stages of the war. If all losses (in air and on ground) are taken into account the attrition rate works out to 2.16 percent for Pakistan Air Force and 1.49 percent for IAF. This ratio would have undoub-tedly tilted much more in India's favour if IAF had not been barred from striking PAF in East Pakistan. That itself is curious. President Ayub had declared a war on India and PAF in East Pakistan had attacked Indian airfields and destroyed a large number of aircraft. But the Defence Secretary of India "personally issued orders" to bar IAF from striking PAF in East Pakistan! The reasons for this have never been explained by anyone beyond a vague mention of a Chinese threat.



The second major myth that continues to haunt India's defence establishment is that the IAF "failed" to provide adequate support to the Indian Army. Once again the facts speak otherwise. In particular, close air support to the Indian Army on the morning of September 6 has come under severe continuing criticism, especially when PAF was mauling 15 Division during its daylight advance toward Lahore. But evidence clearly indicates that the Corps Commander had negatived the use of IAF for close support in this sector. The authors indicate that PAF devoted 27% of its combat air effort to close air support of its army compared to IAF devoting 18%. But this translates to PAF flying 647 sorties and IAF flying 729 sorties on close air support to the Indian Army (not to talk of another 709 IAF sorties devoted to battlefield interdiction which had an enormous impact in squeezing supply of ammunition to Pakistani forward troops. In fact the authors are only partially correct in stating that international pressure brought about a ceasefire. The reality is that Pakistan had ammunition left for only a couple of days and its military would have collapsed as a consequence of the war carrying on for a couple of days.

The lack of adequate leadership at the middle levels led to serious losses. But more important, the account of the war and numerous battles provide a clear indication of the gross failure of intelligence placing aircrew and aircraft at enormous risk and causing failures of operational missions in war. For example, even location of airfields against which missions were launched was not known! But the IAF had its own strategic reconnaissance Canberras and it had meticulously mapped territories across the border (its commanding officer was decorated with the Maha Vir Chakra, the second highest gallantry award). But it appears that reconnaissance photographs, if available, were not passed down to the combat units for undertaking their missions. A reading of the book gives the impression that the country did not even possess an intelligence system. Was this due to shift of the Joint Intelligence Committee (of the Chiefs of Staff Committee) out of their jurisdiction after the 1962 debacle, or was it simply the more fundamental deficit of poor intelligence of military significance being available? If the history of the Kargil War 34 years after is any indication, it appears to be a systemic deficit that seems to have continued to afflict Indian defence capability even now.

The book relates the saga of courage and professionalism of combat pilots and the dedication of the ground crews in supporting them and their aircraft. As has happened so often in history, the fighting men paid for the failures of the planning people. The authors have carried out an excellent job of painstakingly putting together enormous details from

The book relates the saga of courage and professionalism of combat pilots and the dedication of the ground crews in supporting them and their aircraft. As has happened so often in history, the fighting men paid for the failures of the planning people.

personal accounts, interviews, diaries and other sources, even from Pakistan.[2] This makes for an absorbing account of the air war of 1965. It therefore, attempts an analysis only on the margins though the volume throws up enormous amount of data for further study and assessment. For example, no attempt has been made to analyse the reasons for the heavy losses by IAF on the ground to PAF strikes. Israel Air Force probably took the cue from this war and carried out the dramatic air strikes on Egyptian and Syrian air forces neutralizing them within hours in 1967. Perhaps because of their focus, the authors have completely ignored (like indeed the official history did) the role and performance of transport and helicopters which no doubt played a crucial role in support of the war. The book also follows the official history in making the mistake of ignoring the "Mentioned in Despatches" as a gallantry award.

In conclusion, this is a fascinating book which would remain of abiding interest to military historians, air warriors and the general public.

Reference

[1] M. Asghar Khan, Air Marshal, *The First Round: Indo-Pakistan War 1965* (London: Islamic Information Services Ltd.. 1979), p. 38

[2] By a strange coincidence, a book titled Great *Air Battles of Pakistan Air Force* by Air Commodore M. Kaiser Tufail (Lahore: Ferozesons Ltd., 2005) was published the same year, which among other things, provides a contradictory account to the famous shooting down of a Sabre by Trevor Keelor in a Gnat on 3rd September, 1965 claiming that the aircraft was flown back to base!

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Saga of Courage

A.M. Vohra

MEN OF STEEL—PAKISTAN'S 6 ARMOURED DIVISION IN THE 1965 WAR
By Major General Abrar Hussain
Army Education Publishing House, Rawalpindi, 2005, pp.153,
price not stated.

The book narrates the operational performance of Pakistan's 6 Armoured Division in the 1965 Indo-Pak war. Pakistan had inducted its Special Services Group personnel in J&K in August1965 to stir an uprising and later launched an offensive in the Chhamb Sector on 1 September 1965. India retaliated by launching an offensive across the Indo-Pak international border in the Lahore Sector on 6 September: India's Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri had warned—retaliation at a place of its choice. As a part of this retaliation, India also launched an offensive in the Pathankot-Sialkot front; between 'Aik' Nullah and 'Degh' Nadi on the night of 7-8 September 1965. General Abrar Hussain was in command of the Division and has given a day-to-day account of Pakistan's response in the Sialkot Sector.

The day-to-day account is from 6 September 1965 onwards when the Division was ordered to move from Gujranwala to Pasrur. Indian forces, a corps of one armoured and three infantry/mountain divisions, crossed the international border during the night of 7-8 September in the Degh Nadi-Charwa area with its main thrust towards Philloura. Abrar Hussain recounts the adjustments carried out to the deployment of his Division in the Badiana, Pasrur, Philloura, Zafarwal area. Their task was "destroying Indian penetration".

By 0500 hrs on 11 September "heavy concentration of artillery fire heralded the launching of the next phase of the Indian offensive against Philloura". "Indian tanks got within tank gun range" 9FF and 11 Cavalry of Pakistan were unnerved. 14 FF and Guides Cavalry were inducted to stabilize the situation. They were unable to prevent Indian forces reaching Philloura cross roads. Advance to Chawinda and Badiana was expected. On 15 September, there were tough battles at both these places. The narrative states that after 3 days of hectic fighting at both Chawinda and Badiana, Indian forces gained a salient between these two objectives but suffered heavy losses. Orders were received at 2200 hours on 22 September that ceasefire had been agreed upon.

There are accounts of other battles, e.g., Zafarwal as also Fatehpur and Chawinda: General Musharraf has, in his Foreword, called the battle of Chawinda as "the greatest tank battle since World ar II'. Tank losses of Pakistan 6 Armoured Division are given and it is claimed that 150 tanks of the Indian Army were destroyed. Making some allowance in both figures, it is likely that about 200 tanks were lost by the two contesting formations.

A book of this nature has a limited appeal and readership; confined primarily to those in uniform, interested professionally. As a background to his narration, the author makes some observations. The first on page 4 –'The causes and magnitude of Indian Armys debacle of 1962'. These observations are both ill informed and caustic. Firstly, the debacle should be called the 'NEFA decbacle' as it was restricted to only one division of the Indian Army operation in NEFA—the 4th Infantry Division, which was routed by the Chinese in the Kameng Frontier Division (FD) of NEFA in October-November 1962. Secondly, he is ill informed when he refers to the 'plea of being ill equipped'. This 'infrantry'division operation in the 'mountainous' region was indeed ill equipped; devoid of mountain artillery, high altitude clothing, and helicopter support in an area where road communications did not exist. Lulled into the 'Hindi-Chini bhai bhai' mindframe of the Krishna Menon era, we had no troops in NEFA until December 1959. The only road in Kameng FD was from the 'Foot Hills' to Bomdila beyond which there was a 1 ton track to Towang. In December 1959 one brigade was earmarked for Kameng FD out of which only one battalion could be located at Towang. BRDB (Border Roads Development Board) came into being only in 1960. This aspect apart, General Hussain makes much of the military aid that India got from the West after the NEFA debacle "'for intimidating' and imposing its will on her weaker neighbours, especially Pakistan". Firstly, a look at the Military Balance' for the years 1962 to 1965, published by the International Institute of Strategic Studies, London, will show what peanuts India received from the West during this period. Secondly, India's concern then was to strengthen the northern border with China and not to 'intimidate' Pakistan.

Apart from the author's observations on the NEFA debacle, his depiction on page 8 of "a better organized and more violent campaign' launched by the freedom fighters of Kashmir in August 1965 is far from the reality of induction of SSG troops in civilian clothes into the Valley to bestir an uprising. An erstwhile commander of the SSG, who felt that the ground had not been prepared for such an uprising has written about this. He was right and the inductees got no support and were handed over to the authorities in many cases.■

Lt. General A.M. Vohra was the Vice Chief of the Indian Army.

Containing The Lemming Impulse

Raja Menon

UNIVERSAL COMPLIANCE : A STRATEGY FOR NATIONAL SECURITY
Edited by George Perkovich
India Research Press, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 220, price not stated.

COMPREHENSIVE SECURITY IN SOUTH ASIA
Edited by Dev Roy Dahal & Nischal Nath Pandey
Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 266, Rs. 695.00

NUCLEAR RISK REDUCTION MEASURES IN SOUTH ASIA: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS
By Upendra Choudhury
Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 124, Rs. 250.00

NUCLEAR RISK REDUCTION MEASURES AND RESTRAINT REGIME IN SOUTH ASIA
By Zafar Nawaz Jaspal
Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, 2004, pp.113, Rs. 240.00

Universal Compliance is the collective work of some notable heavyweights in the field of nuclear nonproliferation policy analyses and includes George Perkovich, Jessica Mathews, Joseph Cirincione, Rose Gottemoeller and Jon Wolfsthal. Produced after a demanding eighteen months of effort, the draft was circulated in 9000 copies as early as 2004, the year in which Perkovich presented his ideas in New Delhi too. The draft was rewritten on the basis of feedbacks from government officials of over twenty countries, industry, analysts, the IAEA and the Conference on Disarmament. The book has a comprehensive set of recommendations to strengthen nuclear nonproliferation, which remains man's best effort yet, to match his ability to destroy the world. The successes in nonproliferation have been considerable, although few and far between, and include the coming into force of the NPT, the Biological Weapons Convention, the Intermediate – Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, the Chemical Warfare Convention and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

The authors are rightly critical that successes only paid attention to signing of treaties and not enough to achieving compliance. So perhaps man's greatest achievement yet, outside the rarefied atmosphere of diplomacy, may actually be the setting up and running of the IAEA which is an extraordinary concept in the field of restraining his talent for self destruction. Some moves to strengthen the early pillars of nonproliferation point to world opinion moving towards the central premise of this book. Such steps include the NSG linking its actions to the IAEA's demand to stop *all* enrichment and reprocessing technology to those countries that don't already have them. They also include the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction programme and the funding of the IAEA to transit from an accounting to an inspecting organization.

Many readers would wonder how universal is universal compliance. The authors have addressed that issue. They acknowledge that the pillars of the NPT, namely, articles I, IV, and VI have been shaken, and restoring them to stability would require all powers on both sides of the broken grand bargain, to reconsider their attitudes. In their words there is a 'balance of obligations', and there are six of them and they need elucidating. The first is to make nonproliferation irreversible (article X), the second to devalue the currency of nuclear weapons (article VI), the third to secure all nuclear materials, the fourth to stop illegal transfers, the fifth (linked to two) is to commit to conflict resolution and the last – to solve the three state problem. The last obligation, so topical in India now, virtually recommends what has actually happened—namely to get India to commit to the same nonproliferation obligations as the P-5, and some more.

The measures to strengthen laws to enforce UN security council Resolution 1540 are a good beginning. These laws look at three areas, the first to hold states to account for non-proliferation behaviour, the second to enforce criminal laws within countries to prevent technology entities from proliferating for profit and the third to enable and legalize interception efforts like the PSI. These measures are certainly achievable, and answer the doubts that have arisen from the case studies of Pakistan, Iran and North Korea. Some further doubt remains on whether the Chinese behaviour in assisting Pakistan is a deliberate state-to-state process that could have been prevented by these laws. Perhaps we could also argue that China was a different kind of state in 1991, before it legally acceded to the NPT, but then again, a Chinese threat to re-supply Pakistan in the same way that the US deal with India promises to do, must create gaps in this defensive perimeter. Admittedly that doubt is at the moment speculative.

The book's second and third set of recommendations are probably interlinked – namely, strengthening IAEA inspections and prescribing guidelines for the use of force. Iran is a good example. It is unlikely that early detection of the bomb making attempt could have occurred through the efforts of the IAEA alone, without the supplementary information coming from the most advanced space surveillance systems, only available with some nations; nor could the negotiations have been conducted with some chance of success without there being in the background, a big power apparently ready to wield a stick without much reason. So it is clear that all the talk of the threat from non-state actors is really dependent on firstly, rogue states breaking loose with the intention of either harbouring non-state actors or threatening nuclear use themselves. Guidelines for military action is an excellent idea, because the window of opportunity for using the military is short, and the decision must be disconnected from an endless General Assembly debate.

Perhaps the easiest of the set of omnibus measures which seem achievable in the short run, are those that aim to secure the nuclear complex. Consisting of a number of 'satisfied' powers, their willingness to take the recommended steps will bring international praise, while retaining their nuclear status. Not so easy would be the measure to guarantee nuclear fuel to states in exchange for giving up on a fuel cycle, as in the case of Iran. This measure is really violative of the NPT, although that should not obstruct the attempt. The question is how, and that leads us to what for instance could the UN, do with implementing what are a set of well considered measures. Should this book be the basis of an attempt to amend the NPT, or should a number of initiatives be run, outside the NPT, like the PSI? Many observers are wary of attempting to fiddle with the NPT, on the grounds that it may unravel. This is not an unjustifiable fear, considering the widely disparate papers that are submitted at every Review Conference, expressing dissatisfaction with the existing NPT.

Some of the more politically oriented measures would obviously raise contentious debate. Would it be possible for the authors to provide a separate division of measures recommended, based on their opinion on the degree of contentiousness, or conversely, the ease or difficulty of implementing them. Guaranteeing Israel's and the Palestinians' right to exist, and requiring Israel to only declare a fissile material moratorium are going to raise a hornet's rest among other countries. Separating the Veto power from nuclear weapons ownership is a good idea but probably dealt with in the measures on UN reform.

The reviewer cannot help feeling that there is a grand idea missing here. Who will lead? Many may push, from the rear, but who will lead, in the way that genuine leadership demands, with forbearance and renunciation? The UN cannot lead in this matter, for it has nothing to give up. Could it be a US-Russia partnership that leads to serious downsizing?

Could it be the UK renouncing nuclear weapons when the life of its Trident submarines are over?

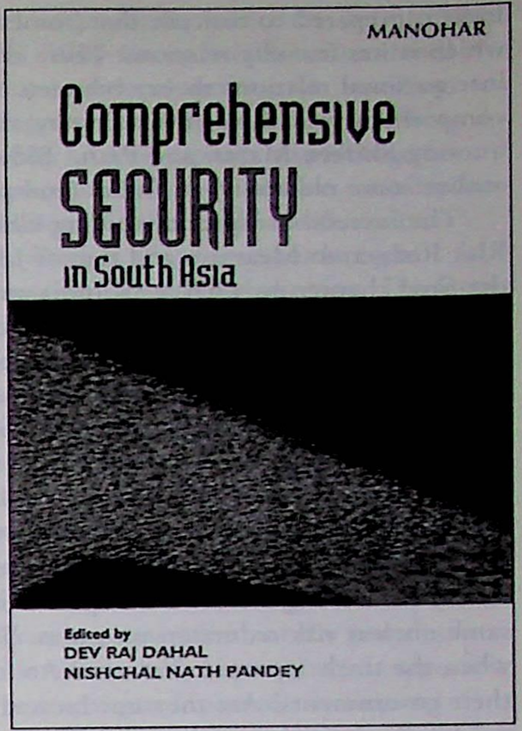
The authors have produced the most comprehensive work in non-proliferation measures to guide policy makers—but the question remains. Who are these policy makers?

Comprehensive Security in South Asia has a well written introduction and the outlines of what constitutes comprehensive security are clearly articulated. An apt term—civil con-existence—is defined as the growing gap between traditional politics and social revolutions. In other words could there be a shift towards 'soft' politics, which is more relevant to solving the non-military threats such as weak inter state trade, demographic pressures, the stresses of globalization , poverty, marginalization of *dalits*, gender discrimination, drug trafficking and the proliferation of armed militants, which in turn reflects the breakdown of law and order? These are ambitious goals and whether the papers in the book give some solutions to these vexatious problems will be seen.

The chapter on Trade Liberalization and Human Security gives an overview of the efforts in the economic globalization forums to remove the barriers to the free flow of trade. Apart from the Cancun and Doha initiatives, India has unilaterally declared much reduced tariffs for a number commodities from Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka. But at the end of the chapter the reader is left with the dissatisfying doubt that had South Asian trade improved, the quality of life of the people would not necessarily become better – at least it is not proved. Certainly, without Bangladeshi *Hilsa,* Calcuttans would suffer and Pakistani pay more for pan, tea and whisky than they need to – but the chapter's emphasis on trade theory leaves little scope for down-to-earth instances of how greater trade would improve human security. The over-theorization continues in the next chapter too which recommends a number of good causes that demands South Asian cooperation – but after the theoretical background there is little substance to get one's teeth into.

Among the regional perspectives on comprehensive security, Ambassador Sobhan (who served in Delhi) feels that governance, religious freedom and effective democracy could provide comprehensive security. The chapter then goes onto describe US policies in the region in great detail and actually blames that country for the absence of comprehensive security in the region! The solution according to Ambasador Sobhan is that the 'US should encourage and promote human development …. It should extend duty free access to all countries of South Asia with immediate effect'. The other solution lies in apparently India 'opening its markets to all exports from the other countries as a prelude to SAFTA negotiations'! The Pakistani Ghani Jaffar's views on comprehensive security are hostile, ignorant, full of factual errors and blames the Indian government for everything that has gone wrong on the subcontinent. Sometimes rambling and sometimes slanderous, the author has quoted extensively from India's free press, while ignoring his own, always out of context and it appears to have been a monumental blunder to have invited the worst example of a Pakistani to have contributed to a South Asian constructive dialogue. There is no mention of comprehensive security in his diatribe and it is an act of kindness of the editor to have published this garbage.

Mohammed Humayun Kabir's work is entirely geo-political and military, and best left unread. He seems unaware that there are 15 million Bangladeshis in India who have voted with their feet and the demographics and land availability are so dangerously mismatched that there is every danger that Kabir's country may fall apart, while he is looking East or West to find other countries to blame. In contrast the second Pakistani Najam Rafique's chapter is entirely constructive and probably illustrates the best example of what comprehensive security should be. However chapters like Rafique's seems to be in a minority as the reviewer plods through the Sri Lankan Perera's and the Bangladeshi Kabir's entirely wrongheaded notion of what comprehensive security means. In many ways the most constructive chapters are from the military (Lt. General Nambiar) and a security analyst (Chandran).



Therefore at the end of reading this book it becomes clear that if there is a concept such as 'comprehensive security', most of the contributing authors of this book seem innocent of any understanding of the subject. In theory, the idea of inviting non-military or non-security analysts to a study on comprehensive security should have led to a tangible shift in emphasis, to common cause issues such as democracy, governance, gender equality, water and other quality of life indices. But most of the contributing authors had obviously come to the conference to air seriously hostile political views. A book best ignored in the interests of comprehensive security.

In *Nuclear Risk Reduction Measures and Restraint Regime in South Asia* Jaspal's introduction sums up his concern and those of all well meaning people of South Asia at the failure of the two governments to establish some kind of nuclear risk reduction measures five years after becoming overt nuclear weapon powers. During those five years there was the Kargil war, and the mobilization of the Indian armed forces over the attack on the Indian parliament. Neither crisis seemed to have rung any alarm bells in the minds of the decision makers of both governments that nuclear risks have so far been avoided through luck and good fortune. Jaspal looks at the motivation for the weapons programmes of the two countries in his opening chapters. His overview of the Pakistani programme is comprehensive and authoritative and there is little to fault his view that Pakistan having fought three wars with India could hardly afford not to go nuclear in the reality of living with a nuclear armed India. Jaspal's analysis of the Indian motivation is deeply flawed since he fails to understand the huge literature that surrounds the weaponization of China , the refusal of Jawaharlal Nehru to match China's actions, the encouragement given by the Americans to India to go nuclear and the Jan Singh's (predecessor to the BJP) call for a nuclear India as early as 1964, expressed in their manifesto.

Stimuli to become a nuclear weapon power has also been misunderstood in a major way, since the four arguments that drive weaponization programmes are common to all countries – namely, domestic compulsions , aspirations to great power status, push from the scientific bureaucracy and security compulsions. It would be simplistic to denigrate any country's weapons programme merely because security compulsions don't seem to swamp the other three. However Jaspal is justified in saying how hard Pakistan argued for a nuclear weapons free and missile free South Asia. Impartial observers would be impressed by these arguments. Unfortunately India saw all these moves as attempts by the US, China and Pakistan to cut India down, by tying it up inextricably with a power one seventh its size, while leaving China out of the agreement.

Jaspal's narrative of CBM negotiations would be a useful guide to any student researching the subject and no one can have any objection to his recommendations for supporting agreements to run Nuclear Risk Reduction Measures. Many of them have been discussed in bilateral track II meetings. The problem however appears to be the 'centrality' of the Kashmir dispute. Pakistan believes that India will concede 'something' on Kashmir , despite no agreements being signed on any other dispute.

India is prepared to concede that 'something' to a Pakistan with which it has friendly relations. There is an obvious dysfunction in international relations theory between the two countries. The book is comprehensive and worth reading by any researcher , although quoting Shireen Mazari and Praful Bidwai often would lose the author some credibility in India. (and probably Pakistan too)

The incredible aspect of reading Choudhry's book on Nuclear Risk Reduction Measures and that of Jaspal, is that when it comes to the final chapter on what steps India and Pakistan need to take, there is virtually no disagreement on what measures would be beneficial. It is therefore clear that starting from divergent start points, nuclear analysis in South Asia lead to the same conclusions. This is not surprising, since nuclear risk reduction measures are necessary when there is hostility and political measures to contain that hostility may not be effective on every occasion. But both books fail to clearly state the reasons why government negotiations make a mockery of nuclear CBMs when Track II specialists, like the authors themselves can clearly see the logic and advantages of implementing virtually the same nuclear risk reduction measures. What really is the problem, when the track 1 people take over? Are they given limited briefs by their governments? Are they uneducated in this subject and therefore need extensive briefings by specialists before engaging in negotiations? In other words, are the governments the problem, or are the negotiations the problem? Perhaps the authors were diffident about stating their views on this important aspect. (Some answers can be found in Choudhry's book). The Indians see the primary problem as cross border terrorism, but are not willing to concede that if terrorism – cross border or indigenous – is the only lever Pakistan has to ensure that India will negotiate, how can they give it up entirely. But there are bigger arguments lurking behind this relatively simpler framework. Some Pakistanis believe that hostility will not cease even if Kashmir is resolved, because India intends to 'undo' the Partition. Indians are incredulous when they hear this and aver that the problem lies with the Pakistan army which is not under control, and even less so is the ISI which seems to have some grandiose but vague aims of dismembering India. Politicians are clearly too distracted to learn about nuclear risk reduction measures. Foreign office career officers in both countries have few specialists on nuclear matters, and they are often posted in inaccessible billets.

Choudhry's book has a most useful summary of NRRMs in the final chapter, but his argument that NRRMs in South Asia face bleak prospects because of an unfavourable international situation is untenable. The South Asian nuclear scenario is certainly the most live one today and must receive special attention, all by itself.■

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Book News	Book News

Iqbal (1877-1938) by Mustan Mir is an informative work on the life and work of the distinguished poet, philosopher and statesman of South Asia. *Sinan* (c. 1490-1588) by J.M. Rogers is the biography of the famous architect whose buildings are ranked with the finest in Renaissance Europe. Both volumes are part of the Makers of Islamic Civilization Series published by Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies,Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 157 & 133, Rs. 195.00 each.

Politics And Protection

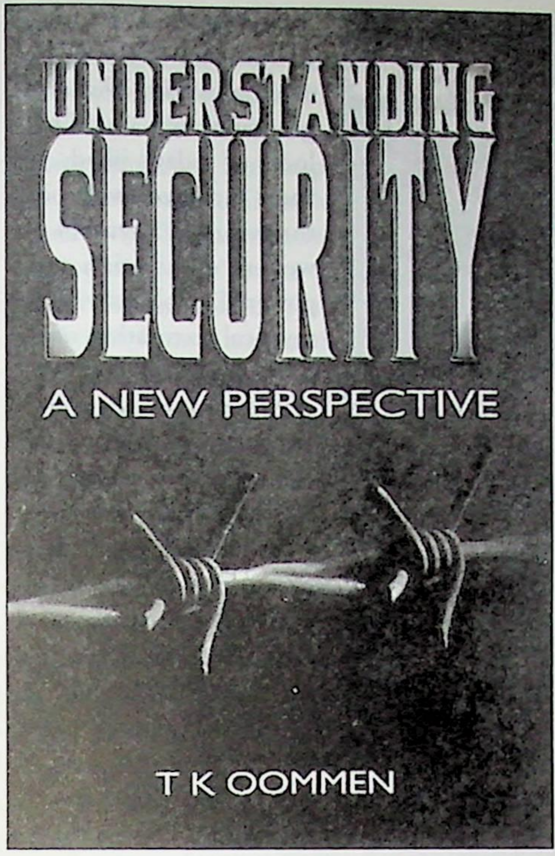
Rajesh M. Basrur

UNDERSTANDING SECURITY: A NEW PERSPECTIVE
By T. K. Oommen
Macmillan, Delhi, 2006, pp.ix+174, Rs. 320.00

The post-Cold War period has produced much speculation, review and reformulation of thinking in security studies and international relations theory. Beyond the concern with immediate practical questions such as "what is the new configuration of power in world politics?" and "what are the sources of insecurity for states and societies today?" lie deeper theoretical issues. The discipline of international relations is driven by differences on fundamental issues between realists, liberals, and constructivists. Their debates on the essential constituents of international relations and the extent to which change is possible are reflected in security studies, which itself is engaged in much discussion as to what constitutes security. As democracy sweeps across the world – if not always in structural form, then at least in aspiration of some kind – there is growing acknowledgement that the frame of reference for security is no longer the state, but people. The state remains essential to the attainment of security, but it is simultaneously the source of insecurity. Politics – who controls the state, and how it is organized to navigate the pulls of divergent inter-state as well as intra-state interests – is the key.

In this slim, thought-provoking volume, T. K. Oommen brings his theoretical strengths to bear on a wide terrain that traverses the realms of sociology and political science. His understanding of security seeks to go beyond traditional distinctions, such as those between realists and liberals in international relations theory and between levels of analysis in social science theory. He rejects the realists' "minimal understanding" for its "conceptual skimpiness" and the liberals' holdall outlook for its "conceptual obesity" (p. 136). Instead, he argues that security/insecurity emerges from the interaction of state, market, and civil society. Moreover, realists and liberals fail to give due place to symbolic violence, to which the author correctly accords as much prominence as he does to physical and structural violence. Without denying the importance of military and economic sources of insecurity, Oommen focuses on three basic forms of violence and insecurity: genocide (broadly, *all* deliberate physical annihilation of humans), culturocide (liquidation of identities), and ecocide (environmental destruction). Some may find the book leaning overly toward issues of identity and ethnic conflict. But it does a signal service to the discipline of security studies by doing so, for it underlines aspects of contemporary conflict that are central to human security today.

Chapter 1 of the book looks at the history of security and at its general concepts. The state-market-civil society relationship is highlighted, with security treated as the "conjoint responsibility" of all three (p. 12). Avoiding the pitfalls of focusing on specific level of analysis, Oommen posits three continua – the macro unit, the meso unit and the micro unit – which could equally be read as a single continuum from the globe to the individual. The author argues that there are three broad spheres of security studies: state formation and factors related to state-making; societal security; and environment. Chapter 2 shows how the power of European states, which enabled them to engage in colonial expansion, was backed up by concepts of identity in which peoples of the colonized territories were subject to denigrative other-ing through the pseudo-scientific discipline of anthropometry. This enabled them to justify (mainly to themselves, one might add) their subjugation of Asia, Africa and the Americas. Yesterday's civilizing mission has been replaced by today's "good governance," epitomized by structural adjustment and the minimal state. Islamophobia, racism and gender oppression still run



rampant in the First World. True, but more than parenthetically, we might ask: where do they not? The author does sometimes unwittingly slip back and forth between a universal conception of security and a North-South dichotomy.

Chapter 3 underscores Oommen's universalism, though, by rejecting the First/Second/Third World typology and instead distinguishing between the Old World and the New World. Thus, he argues, "Europe, Africa and Asia share the same trajectory of state-making in contrast to the state-making project of the New World, the Americas, Australia, New Zealand, etc." (p. 39). The former face conflicts relating to identity arising from the "ethnification" of identity groups, with ethnies (outsiders) pitted against "nationals" (insiders). The New World, having successfully indulged in culturocide and genocide of the original inhabitants, does not experience such conflicts in the same measure (though immigrant minorities do come into conflict with culturally different majorities). This chapter is a key part of the book, bringing out the range of issues involved in the interaction between ethnic identity and national identity. At the end of the chapter, Oommen lapses back into the First World/Third World dichotomy in stressing (correctly, in this reviewer's opinion) that the linkage between these entities are close. Third World wars are possible because of arms transfers from the First World; necessitated by the effects of colonial rule; and sustained by the Third World's pursuit of the European model of the nation-state (p. 62).

Chapter 4 encapsulates the security problems associated with state-making. Oommen refines Charles Tilly's distinction between state-seeking nationalism (which is secessionist or autonomist) and state-led nationalism (which is assimilationist) by adding one more category. State-renouncing nationalism is espoused by groups "which are content to maintain their federal identity within a federal polity" (p. 69). While this is not problematic (unless its adherents' legitimate demands are unmet), state-centred nationalism, whether by social groups or by the state itself, can be. The chapter goes on to enumerate the types of social movements or mobilizations that may cause security problems. These range from secessionist movements to mobilizations against the democratic elite. In Chapter 5, which looks at governance and "everyday security," the author looks at five sources of insecurity: income disparity, patriarchy and gender discrimination, cultural heterogeneity, externality, and social hierarchy (caste). Chapter 6 discusses environment, its securitization (i.e., transformation into a security issue), and various approaches to environment and security, none of which is found satisfactory. The homocentric approach to environment embedded in western civilization facilitates environmental destruction, while the cosmocentric approach of eastern religions breeds an orientation of dependence on the environment. The author calls for a balance between these and between the "excessive individualism" of the West and the "excessive collectivism" of the East (shades of North-South again?) (p. 132). Chapter 7 sums up the book.

Understanding Security is a refreshing change from the standard writings on human security that have proliferated since the early 1990s. Credit must be given to the Delhi Policy Group, which has produced substantial work in the area of non-traditional security, for providing backing for the book. Oommen's grasp of history, sociology, and international relations theory is remarkable, as is his capacity to pull together their diversity in a compact volume such as this. A valuable contribution of the book is the author's affirmation of the central importance of territory (in relation to identity), which is often viewed as being of declining significance in the present era of rapid globalization. The focus on symbolic violence is another. Disciplinary orthodoxy tends to reiterate the overriding importance of state security, while new thinking focuses on widening the domain of security to economic issues, democratic politics and environment. This book adds to our understanding of security by focusing on symbolic sources of security and insecurity, especially identity, without losing sight of its links to ordinary politics. One wishes there was more, though. Not enough is said about the nature of the relationship between state, market and civil society. There is no real discussion of economic and social transformation and their effects on society, for instance, the rise of grasping materialism, or the growth of religious fundamentalism. The North-South dichotomy, which appears throughout the book, needs to be interrogated, particularly since so much of the South has been heading northward in recent years. Perhaps a follow-up work will fill the gaps and add even more to the insights that Oommen provides in this exceptional book.■

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INDIAN WOMEN SCIENTISTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE NUCLEAR ISSUE
By Adluri Subramanyam Raju
WISCOMP, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 63, price not stated.

The monograph, funded by Women in Security Conflict Management and Peace (WISCOMP), this study is one of the first attempts to locate the priorities of women scientists in the context of the Indian nuclear tests of 1998. In the long term, it is initiatives such as this research by Subramanyam Raju that will accomplish the hitherto neglected task of yielding viewpoints from multiple perspectives, in all their different parts and in sum.

However, the study falls short on two accounts. The first problem arises with the definition of the identity of the respondents. The author gives the impression that this is a study towards a broadly constructivist understanding of the nuclear issue – in particular, focusing on the gendered paradigm. Although it is emphasized repeatedly that women scientists "constitute the universe of this study", the various facets of the respondents' identities are not explicitly discussed.

The second problem is of the conceptual parameters of the study. In the section detailing the review of literature, it is asserted that extensive literature offering essentialist and feminist points of views have been used to inform the broad contours of this study. Hence, the absence of any such perspective in the questions asked of the respondents is noticeable.

But for a question about the role of women in nuclear issues, the questionnaire demonstrates a generic tendency, thus not obliging the respondents to think from a gendered or scientific point of view. This tendency becomes problematic only because the researcher has attempted to investigate whether the perception of Indian women on the nuclear issue is determined by their position as scientists or by virtue of being women. We are, thus, left with the reductio ad absurdum of the logic of this study – that asking typical questions has elicited generic answers or answers affected by the professional background as opposed to answers affected by the gender of the respondent and so, the respondents' perceptions are not determined by them being female.

Nevertheless, the study generates primary data on women scientists' perceptions on the nuclear issue. A first-of-its-kind study the research also accentuates the remarkable inconsistencies in the perspectives of these women scientists by bringing to light the way these women prioritize issues – indeed, an articulation problem that needs to be addressed.■

Swapna Kona is a Research Intern in the Institute of Peace & Conflict Studies, New Delhi.

Terror Patterns

B. G. Verghese

LANDSCAPES OF THE JIHAD: MILITANCY, MORALITY, MODERNITY
By Faisal Devji
Foundation Books, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 184, Rs. 395.00

JIHAD, HINDUTVA AND THE TALIBAN: SOUTH ASIA AT THE CROSS-ROADS
By Ifthikar.H. Malik
Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2005, pp. 294, Rs 495. 00

BANGLADESH, THE NEXT AFGHANISTAN?
By Hiranmay Karlekar
Sage, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 311, Rs 320.00

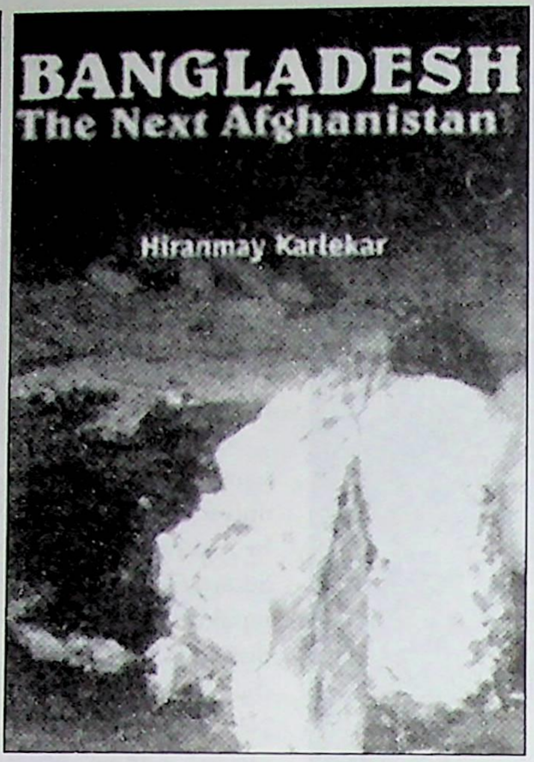
Jihad is a much misunderstood term according to Islamic scholars who say it means struggle, even against oneself or iniquity of any kind and not necessarily against the infidel. But many go by the ictionary meaning, which is given as "holy war". And it is this that oubles modern society which now confronts jihadi terror and other arieties of mindless violence. India was a target of terror long before 9/11, which connotes a self-serving history and geography of this global menace. The "War on Terror" started late as many powerful actors, who should have known better, implicitly differentiated between "good" terror, as long as it did not affect them, and "bad" terror, until the moment it began to hurt. Some tragically still do.

Terror and the jihad species thereof has travelled a long way in public consciousness and geography over the past few decades. South Asia has been particularly afflicted, most recently Bangladesh. The books under review address the issue of jihad and its manifestations in the region

Faisal Devji's work marks an important contribution towards understanding what he calls "landscapes of jihad", a term used to describe the new patterns of belief and practice (of Islam) produced by the actions of Al-Qaeda. The bombings of 1998 (Dar-es-Salaam – the author's place of birth— and Nairobi)— followed by 9/11 "globalized" an Islamic consciousness among both believers and others. It is his thesis that Al-Qaeda not merely spawned a new kind of networked militancy but fragmented the traditional structures of Muslim authority, throwing open the world of Islam to new ways of conceiving the future. It thus broke down "the old-fashioned narratives of clerical, mystical and even fundamentalist authority" and their respective forms of organization. Does this then pave the way for new interpretations of Islam – ijtehad – leading in time to a new Islamic order?

Devji traces Al-Qaeda's jihad genealogy to West Asian Wahabi Sunni Islam which, however, operates largely outside the region. The Taliban was influenced by Deobandi influences from India and was nurtured in Pakistani seminaries that were in turn funded by Saudi Wahabi money. Its leader, Mullah Omar, sough to annoint himself as Commander of the Faithful in Kandahar and was described as Caliph by Osama bin Laden. The author also distinguishes jihad from fundamentalism, as the latter is ideological and often territorial or local whereas the former is global. The jihad in Afghanistan took on the garb of holy war against Soviet atheism and now sees itself as the only force able to fend off the US-Israeli "crusader alliance" to dominate the Holy lands. The Twin-Towers attack was to globalize the jihad. Islamic clerics and fundamentalists have decried 9/11 as un-Islamic. Thus the jehadi radicalization of Islam has made Islamic fundamentalism "moderate".

Jihad has been wrenched from the language of the state to being an ndividual duty, "more ethical than political in nature". This mysticism is raced back to sufi tendencies, which in the 18-20th centuries pitted



itself against western domination of the colonial world. This same geography remains the locus of today's jihad, India included, with oil thrown in as a symbol of western domination and power. The objective is a mystical restoration of the caliphate through jihad whose message has been universalized by the media by making millions witness to martyrdom.

Devji's argument that jihad's "ethical" dimension merits possible comparison of Osama with Gandhi is far fetched!. For Gandhi, means were as important as ends and he saw little ethical value in violence. Nor would Gandhi have accepted the idea of "equivalence" of an eye for an eye in jihad in order to establish a balance of terror between the US, which kills innocents, and the jihadi who kills other innocents.

His conclusion is that violence is only a phase and a passing phase of jihad. Its real importance lies in the democratization of Islam, placing ethics above politics. He labels Islam's liberals as "intellectually stagnant", suggesting that jihad is perhaps the road to Islamic transformation. Maybe that will be the outcome, but it would appear a terribly dangerous road to tread.

Iftikhar Malik's book makes a plea for harmony and sanity in South Asia but is flawed by his blinkered and schizophrenic view of India and Indo-Pakistan relations although some of his views on the uglier manifestations of BJP-Hindutva fundamentalism and pogroms such as in Gujarat are fully justified. But to equate jihad and Hindutva virtually as mirror images of one another is to stretch logic.

Malik portrays the rise of the political right, whether in the form of Bush's neo-conservative, born-again Christian fundamentalism, the jehadi movements or Hindutva as part of a global trend. He criticizes talk of "political Islam" as a confused amalgam of ideas to posit a rising threat and the "othering" of Islam. He points to the fact that both Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden were used by the United States in the past. He then goes on to interpret men like Osama, Mohammad Omar and others as being "imbued with an idealized recreation of a sublime and ideal Muslim past "squandered by a corrupt and inept elite" who have become surrogates for a morally decadent but exploitative West. Their defeat of Soviet power in Afghanistan emboldened them to take on other usurpers. These soldiers of Allah are dedicated to "the higher goal" of taking on the US and Israel and emancipating Kashmir, Palestine, Chechnya, Iraq and Afghanistan, lands and communities of believers who have been invaded and ravaged by non-believers. In turn, the War on Terror is essentially a War on Islam. This has seen a "return to Islam" in Turkey, Pakistan and Bangladesh, embedded in a sense of hurt over continued Muslim disempowerment. The West's response to this has been to be "open to business, closed to the people". Islam, fundamentalism and terrorism are by no means synonymous even though "political Islam" ranges from moderation to fundamentalism. Nor is Islam monolithic, but represents multifarious strands.

Hindutva, "Kabul to Karbala" and Biharis in Bangladesh are brought in as some kind of counterfoil to jihad but confused arguments make for weak chapters. Sample some of these citations. Jihadis and trans-border terrorism are described dismissively as "catch phrases" and "official verbiage". "In terms of symbols, the names of all the (Indian) states are in

Hindi, the national anthem is in Hindi (wrong !), places and offices of national significance are named in Hindi…". "Nehru, Kripalani and others kept on expecting Pakistan's eventual amalgamation into India….. When Pakistan, contrary to such presuppositions, managed to survive despite numerous handicaps, India's leadership, incensed over the disputatious nature of Kashmir, resorted to denunciation of Pakistan's alliance with Western powers". The BJP government "even went to ironic extents (sic) just to manoeuvre Pakistan into some strategic miscalculation, including a botched hijack attempt (presumably the IC 814 hijack from Kathmandu to Kandahar) to start hostilities…"!! "Nativist groups have often taken up cudgels against (Muslim) economic refugees from Bangladesh …. (while) Hindu refugees from the turbulent state of Kashmir are conveniently portrayed as victims of Muslim fundamentalism". Behind all "ethno-regional movements" in India, "one notices an indigenous revulsion against majority-led irredentism". The section on the Kashmir saga tells a partisan story, starting with the assertion that J&K was "arm-twisted" into acceding to India.

However, Malik is not uncritical of Pakistan and harks back to Jinnah's vision of a tolerant, plural, democratic state. He sees danger in the "de-Indianization of Pakistan and Bangladesh and the de-Islamization of India" and pleads that the security and identity of the peoples of the subcontinent will be better met by greater awareness of their shared pluralism and heritage. This can be achieved by the transformation of textbooks and greater regional cooperation. Amen.

Hiranmay Karlekar is clear that Islam and jehadi terrorism are by no means synonymous and sees the latter as a fundamentalist Wahabi Saudi-Sunni offshoot. This brought great sorrow to Afghanistan under the Taliban and the export of terrorism therefrom engulfed the world in violence. Now, following western pressures on that country and on Pakistan after 9/11, Karlekar fears jihadi elements are moving their base to Bangladesh where they have found fertile soil. *Bangladesh, The Next Afghanistan*? sees the emerging threat as a clear and present danger.

The story begins with the anti-liberation role played by the Jamaat-e-Islami leaders Golam Azam and Maulana Abdul Rahim in Bangladesh in 1971. They fled to Pakistan and then made their way to Saudi Arabia where they raised funds to defend Islam in Bangladesh. Nationalist anger against those who had collaborated with Pakistan led to their prosecution; but a general amnesty inexplicably declared by Sheikh Mujib in 1973 enabled these elements to return to Bangladesh. The assassination of Mujib and the central leadership of the Awami League in 1975 was followed by grant of indemnity to the killers and an accelerated process of Islamization that President Zia ur Rahman carried forward.

The Afghanistan war triggered new developments and Bangladesh gradually became a "playground for the ISI" in collaboration with Bangladesh's Directorate of Field Intelligence. Al Queda, ousted from Afghanistan, moved to Bangladesh, using it to launch attacks against the US consulate in Chennai and Kolkata. Karlekar states that the country had become a base for infiltration into (Northeast) India, a conduit for deadly arms, a terrorist hub, a sanctuary for Indian insurgent groups and a safe haven for assassins to made a bid on Sheikh Hasina's life and later kill the senior Awami League adviser, Kibria. The chilling fact is that no one has been caught and none has been punished for these crimes. Dhaka has been in denial in the face of repeated Indian demarches and specific charges with supporting evidence. The bland retort to steady illicit immigration has been that there is no reason for Bangladeshis to take refuge in a country where economic conditions are no better than at home. The August 21, 2001 attack on Hasina, in which 22 Awami party workers were killed, was ascribed to a sinister campaign to destabilize Bangladesh by certain foreign interests chagrined by the BNP's electoral victory. A one-man commission reporting later that year said much the same thing. Anti-Indian rhetoric reached a shrill pitch.

The inclusion of the Jamaat and Islami Oikya Jote in the present government has emboldened these fundamentalist parties. The Harkat-ul-Jihad-al Islami was set up by Osama in 1992 and is believed to have been involved in terrorist actions in Bangladesh and across the border. It was declared a terrorist organization by the US in 2002. With its lower profile thereafter, the leading role in the jihadi movement was assumed by Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB) under Bangla Bhai, a shadowy figure with many aliases.

Karlekar fears that the run up to the 2006 general elections in Bangladesh could aggravate matters. The unfolding developments he traces are not a happy augury. Among these are pressures on the judiciary, the election commission, the media and minorities, including Ahmediyas; major incidents of gun-running, serial bomb blasts across the country and manifestations of moral and cultural censorship. The country has been sadly polarized between Government and Opposition in virtually every field.

There is reason for India to be concerned over the rise and spread of fundamentalism both within and around this country. Some 40 per cent or more of the global Muslim population lives in South Asia. This community was until the 1940s one of the most progressive and liberal in the Islamic world. Thereafter, politics intruded and religion became an identity marker, singling out "the other". Now Islam has been wrongly demonized as the font of global terror. The silent majority of enlightened South Asian Islamic opinion disapproves the corruption of jihad, transforming struggle to attain virtuous ends into mindless violence, whatever the causative factors. These saner elements are to be found in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh and ways should be found to bring them together with their non-Muslim counterparts to work for the restoration of communal harmony within a plural, democratic and liberal frame. This is a challenge for governments and democratic political parties as much as for civil society and religious scholars to confront and develop a counter strategy to roll back the dark forces of terror, violence, intolerance and obscurantism.■

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Perils of a National Security State

Sushant Sareen

FULCRUM OF EVIL: ISI-CIA-AL QAEDA NEXUS
By Maloy Krishna Dhar
Manas Publications, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 402, Rs. 795.00

THE TRUE FACE OF JEHADIS
By Amir Mir
Lotus Collection, Roli Books, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 310, Rs. 395.00

DECADE OF THE DACOITS
By Imdad Hussain Sahito
Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2006, pp. 195, Rs. 350.00

Many of Pakistan's current problems can be traced back to the circumstances under which the country came into existence. The fear of being gobbled up by a 'Hindu' India not reconciled to the Partition, prompted a flimsy, fictitious and faulty ideological framework in which Islam became the defining identity, and India, the eternal enemy. In order to confront a much larger India, Pakistan needed not just a powerful patron – America – but also needed to forge instruments that could tie India down through asymmetric means.

Pakistan's adroit exploitation of the faultlines in the Indian polity – in the North-east, in Punjab, in Jammu and Kashmir and increasingly among disenchanted and disaffected Indian Muslim youth – has been part of this asymmetric strategy, which Indians refer to as proxy war. But both this low-cost strategy as well as the paranoia that gave rise to a national security state in which politics took a backseat and the military-bureaucratic establishment called the shots, has extracted a heavy price from Pakistan – something that comes out clearly from the three books under review.

In his book *Fulcrum of Evil: ISI-CIA-Al Qaeda Nexus,* former spymaster, Maloy Krishna Dhar details ISI activities all over India. Despite the demonization of the ISI, which the author calls a 'fulcrum of evil', there is a lot more to the book than mere Pakistani-bashing. The author gives details of ISI activities across India, that go far beyond the insinuations that most of us read in the daily papers. Indeed, the author is at his best when he discusses and details the various covert operations being carried out by the ISI inside India.

His interpretation, however, of the policies, motives, mindsets of the Pakistanis are one-dimensional and therefore problematic. Dhar tends to ignore that Pakistan's paranoia over India is partly a function of Indian attitude towards Pakistan shortly after Partition. The general attitude in India was that the Partition arrangement would collapse sooner rather than later. This coupled with some of the steps taken by the Indian government – holding back the division of assets, breaking off trading relations because Pakistan refused to devalue their Rupee in line with the Indian devaluation, stopping of river waters etc., all conditioned the Pakistani establishment, and even public, attitude towards India. In the circumstances, it was natural for Pakistan to try and balance Indian superiority through alliances and use of asymmetric strategies.

More importantly, the ISI's ability to sponsor trouble in India would never have reached the levels it has if India had managed its affairs well, especially in the frontier states like Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir and the North-eastern states. As Dhar quite correctly points out, the Indian state's administrative mismanagement coupled with the political skullduggery of the political establishment – where even a chief minister of an important Indian state is willing to play ball with the ISI in order to cement his vote-bank and criminals with known ISI connections are elected to parliament and made ministers because it is the 'secular' thing to do – have created a fertile ground for the ISI to exploit the situation to its benefit.

Any intelligence agency worth its salt would have done what the ISI has and is doing in India. To call it a 'fulcrum of evil' is therefore a bit far-fetched. Intelligence agencies are not in the business of preaching moral science. Subversion, disinformation, even assassinations are all legitimate tools in the intelligence business and to give the devil its due, the ISI has managed to employ these tools to great effect inside India.

Probably the most potent and damaging instrument that the ISI has deployed against India is radical Islam, or Jihad. The use of Jihad however was quite natural given the Islamist underpinnings of the Pakistani state. It is however important to understand that Pakistan's military-bureaucratic establishment has generally used Islam cynically rather than out of any religious fervour. Other than Hamid Gul and Javed Nasir, most other ISI chiefs were not fanatical Islamists.

Of course, to the extent that a process of reverse indoctrination also took place (a phenomenon that Khaled Ahmed talks about in the foreword to *The True Face of Jehadis)*, meant that the patron-client relationship between the ISI and the jihadi militias was reversed. The emergence of rogue elements within the ISI with a personal Islamist agenda, fighting their own private jihads was a natural consequence. This, coupled with the loss of internal sovereignty caused by the growing power of the jihadis, led to a blowback of the policy of using radical Islam as an instrument of foreign policy.

In *The True Face of Jehadis*, Amir Mir exposes the past and present links between the Jihadis (including the Al Qaeda) and the ISI. Mir belongs to a small band of intrepid journalists in Pakistan who have documented and exposed the role of the "agencies" (read ISI) in the deteriorating law and order situation in Pakistan. The first edition of the book, which was published in Pakistan in 2004, appeared to be a rehashed version of reports and analyses filed by Mir in various Pakistani news magazines, including the *Weekly Independent, Herald* and *Newsline.* But in this edition, Mir has added more value by collating material published both in Pakistan and abroad, and produced an excellent volume that gives a fairly comprehensive account of the Mullah-Military alliance in Pakistan.

Mir profiles the various Jihadi organizations and gives a bird's eye view of not only the cross-linkages between the Jihadis and the ISI, the Taliban in Afghanistan and the Al Qaeda, but also points to the involvement of the criminal underworld, including the infamous Dawood Ibrahim, in providing financial and logistic support to the Jihadis. He also exposes the divisions within the ranks of the jihadi organizations and how these have been exploited by the ISI to keep control over these organizations. He delves into an area of great interest to observers around the world – the tussle within the Pakistan army between the Islamists and the reformists. Mir is quite sceptical about the steps taken by the Musharraf regime in effecting a u-turn on the use of Jihadi militias, but he quite cleverly relies on reports of US think-tanks to say as much. This is quite understandable considering that Mir has had his car burnt by "unknown" people, received threats to his life that forced him into exile for some time, has lost his job as editor of the *Weekly Independent* and later the *Herald.* Nevertheless, Mir's book is a valuable source of information in understanding the impact on Pakistani society and polity of the policy of using Jihad as an instrument of foreign and domestic policy.

The *Decade of the Dacoits* by Imdad Hussain Sahito, has nothing to do with the Jihad industry. And yet it is book that highlights the growing lawlessness and breakdown of law and order in Sindh, a

Pakistan's adroit exploitation of the faultlines in the Indian polity – in the North-east, in Punjab, in Jammu and Kashmir and increasingly among disenchanted and disaffected Indian Muslim youth – has been part of this asymmetric strategy, which Indians refer to as proxy war. But both this low-cost strategy as well as the paranoia that gave rise to a national security state in which politics took a backseat and the military-bureaucratic establishment called the shots, has extracted a heavy price from Pakistan – something that comes out clearly from the three books under review.

process that has been aided not just by the easy availability of modern arms because of the growing Jihad industry but also as a result of political unrest in the province. After reading the book, the impression one gets is that the state of affairs in Sindh is very similar to that in Bihar, with police officials either hand in glove with the dacoits or too scared to confront them, local politicians protecting the dacoits and using them to settle scores with rivals, the general lack of governance coupled with social injustices and economic deprivation, all of which lead even some highly educated people to take to crime. Ironically, both Bihar and Sindh are the cradles of civilization in this part of the world.

While Sahito deals with the period from 1984-94, much of what he writes holds true even today. The Urdu daily, *Jang*, is full of stories of kidnappings, dacoity, highway robbery and other such crimes in Sindh. Trains, buses and cars are looted practically every day. There is of course the usual ebb and flow in these incidents with the dacoits going easy during periods of intense activity by the state to curb their activities and going back into business once the pressure eases.

Sahito's book is a well researched piece of work that details the network, planning, modus operandi, and most importantly reasons – revenge, disputes, injustice, oppression and unemployment – that have made the dacoits such a menace and kidnapping for ransom an industry in Sindh. The magnitude of the problem can be gauged by a single number – Sahito estimates that some 20,000 people were involved in dacoity during the period 1984-94.

Clearly, the growth of dacoity in Sindh is a manifestation of a systemic failure at the provincial level, just as inability of the state to bottle up the Jihad Frankenstein is a sign of a systemic failure at the national level. The problem is that retrieving the situation requires a complete systemic overhaul, including an ideological redefinition of what Pakistan stands for. This is a monumental task, and perhaps one that is impossible without some kind of a big-bang, or if you will, a revolution.■

Sushant Sareen, a Pakistan watcher, is the editor of *Pakistan Opinions and Trends.*

New India's New Foreign Policy

Harish Khare

ENGAGING WITH THE WORLD: CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY
Edited by Rajen Harshe and K.M. Seethi
Orient Longman, New Delhi, 2005, pp.492, Rs. 750.00

INDIA AND EMERGING ASIA
Edited by R.R. Sharma
Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2005, pp.331, Rs. 640.00

In February 1949, Jawaharlal Nehru addressed a gathering of information ministers from the provinces in New Delhi. As was his wont he soon digressed into the foreign policy arena. He said: "One of my old colleagues loudly protested and said that when I went to England no one knew what sort of secret agreements I had made and that those agreements had aligned India to certain countries and so she was bound to be on their side in case of war in the world." Nehru was referring to the socialist leader, Asoka Mehta's criticism of India's decision to remain as a member of the Commonwealth, even after becoming a republic. Those were early days but the habits of wild accusations were already being cultivated. More than fifty-five years later Dr. Manmohan Singh has faced similar criticism of having made some secret deals with the United States, selling out India's interests.

From Jawaharlal Nehru to Manmohan Singh, the domestic discourse over foreign policy has always been overlaced, on the one hand, with a peculiar self-righteousness which outsiders find often exasperatingly inexplicable, and, on the other, with a strange distrust of the leaders' capacity to do the right thing. In the same 1949 speech, Nehru noted this proclivity: "We should neither exaggerate India's importance merely to please ourselves nor minimize it. We should understand the realities. We have some influence in the world and it is increasing, but this influence is not such that we can do whatever we like. If we take right steps, especially by making our country strong internally, then our influence in the world will also increase. Loud and passionate speeches or threats or passing of any resolutions and challenging the world do not have any effect on other countries. All this is useless and strong people do not do such things. Ultimately it is the internal strength of a country which is reflected in our activities outside. If we are weak internally, the world can see it and evaluate it and then our words becomes useless."

Nehru's plea for a measured foreign policy discourse has largely remained unheeded, as also remains unappreciated his linkage between internal strength and external clout. Recent controversies reveal the disconnect. The July 2005 India-US civilian nuclear joint statement, India's vote against Iran at Geneva, the massive anti-Bush protests, the American President's March 2006 trip, the Bush-Manmohan agreement, etc. have crowded the foreign policy discourse. Since we are unable to measure realistically our weaknesses or strengths, we are often reduced to exaggerating our own vulnerabilities and overlook our advantages, especially those accruing from a fast growing economy.

Indeed foreign policy practices and orientation have undergone dramatic changes in the last eighteen months. Naturally analysis made before the Manmohan Singh government came to power, would read a bit dated. Of the two collections, the Harshe volume actually is a compilation of papers at a 1998 seminar while the Sharma compilation seems to have been put together closer to the date of publication in 2005. The Harshe contributors are anchored, mostly, in Hyderabad and most of them are outside the domain of the Foreign Office Influence Sphere, whereas the Sharma crowd consists mostly of those who can be deemed to the South Block's friendly clients and includes contributors who discern, delineate and name doctrines after Indian foreign ministers. Even Yashwant Sinha gets to have a doctrine named after him. Given these differences in locations and perspectives, the Harshe collection is detached and critical, while Sharma's men are willing to strike but afraid to wound.

Pursuit of foreign policy is no longer a simple, uncomplicated task, if it ever was, to be performed by the "autonomous elites" of the sovereign state. These "autonomous elites" were believed, especially in the Cold War era, to be somehow possessed of the wisdom and sagacity to divine "national interests". Indian mythology believes that beginning with Nehru, Indian foreign policy was solely guided by national interests and there was a "foreign policy consensus".

As our domestic polity got more and more divisive, and as our economy became more and more "reformed", the foreign policy consensus also began crumbling. A.K.Ramakrishan (in Harshe) points out the re-orientation in economic policies at home has mandated a re-think in foreign policy. If in the Nehruvian era, foreign policy was a source of political legitimacy, in the post-economic reforms years the foreigner's approval became more important than domestic approval, a la Chandrababu Naidu. This reliance on the foreigner's applause and investment produced a domestic backlash, which was sought to be "addressed and confronted by an important segment of the state through the heightened assertion of extreme nationalism." This nationalistic streak, in turn, produced a crisis in India-Pakistan relationship, especially after "9/11".

In the post-Cold War era of globalization, the traditional foreign policy concerns no longer seem all that relevant: anti-imperialism, neo-colonialism, nonalignment, Third World, south-north divide. Instead, as Sharma points out, internal failures have become external concerns and have external consequences. "Owing to poor governance and democracy deficit, ethnic disputes and sectarian strife has led to rising terrorism. These are potentially dangerous areas, which strike the embers of conflict, internal dislocations and social unrest."

While national sovereignty is still an institutionally inviolable concept, no country is in a position to insist too much that what happens within its borders is nobody else's concern. Like all other countries, India too finds itself having to engage with a globalized economy on terms determined by global agencies and forums. The success India has had in the last few years in recording an eight percent growth, in turn, has induced a new confidence in the Indian ruling elites in their ability to engage the world on honourable terms. This new confidence is a logical corollary of the 300-million strong middle class and the influential Indian diaspora in western countries. As an analysis in the Sharma collection points out: " India has unprecedented strategic flexibility in engaging all the major powers at the same time and is under no compulsion to align with either one of the great powers against the other. Nor is it being asked to."

Except a handful of contributions, most of the 36 analytical pieces in the two volumes do not seem to recognize the changed matrix of the Indian foreign policy decision-making. The new India is not willing to be bogged down with traditional shibboleths or formulations, and there is no reason why pursuit of foreign policy options should remain a prisoner of the old slogans. There is a new confidence in our ability to use economic leverage to achieve strategic goals. Policy-makers are far more creative and imaginative than most of the contributors in these two volumes.■

Harish Khare is with *The Hindu*.

India's Strategic Leap

V.R. Raghavan

IMPOSSIBLE ALLIES
By C. Raja Mohan
India Research Press, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 311, $35.95

More has happened in taking India –US relations to higher levels in the last twelve months than in the preceding twelve years. The period has witnessed one of the most intensely argued public discourse on India's strategic needs. The discourse involved political parties, India's Atomic Energy Establishment, a host of experts in India and the US. Indian and US officials parleyed intensively and extensively to make it possible for a new strategic partnership to begin. The media in both countries went hammer and tong for and against the nuclear deal between the two countries. Major nuclear powers and others with nuclear capabilities or uranium and technology resources joined the fray. It had become a free for all for proponents and opponents of the deal. The dust raised by the intellectual melee obscured the fundamentals of the strategic issues for the lay observer.

C. Raja Mohan has rendered a service to the experts and less informed alike, by compiling a readable and credible account of this tumultuous engagement between India and the US. Raja Mohan is a dependable strategic analyst who can be trusted to sift the grain from the chaff in strategic issues. He has the rare ability to look into the future even while reporting on the ongoing and current developments. He is trusted both by the official circles and the reading public because of his record of not putting a spin on facts, or, lending his voice to ideological agendas. His speedily but effectively compiled record of the ups and downs in the process of getting the nuclear deal to come through will be closely read and used as reference material.

The book assesses the sequence, structure and dynamics of the Indo-US negotiations in the Bush Years. Notwithstanding the criticism of President George W. Bush and his policies on many levels, it cannot be denied that he has pushed hard to build a US relationship in dramatically advantageous terms with India. If things move in the coming months on expected lines, India would have come a very long way in gaining all its strategic aspirations since the nuclear tests of 1998. Raja Mohan's valuable book records in clinical terms the history of India's strategic evolution since 1998.

The book starts with the stunning drama of the July 2005 meet in the White House.The statements of President Bush and Dr. Manmohan Singh laid out the broad framework of the nuclear plan the two countries had hammered out. Each word in the Joint Statement had been fought over by officials of both sides, and as Mohan quotes an official, a litre of blood had been spent on each sentence. That statement was a bombshell which sent governments and officials around the world scurrying to understand its ramifications. This reviewer was in Australia with a senior military officer when a Foreign Office mandarin arrived flushed and waving the Joint Statement and quite stunned by its implications on Australian policies towards India. The impact in other parts of the world was no different.

The India –US Nuclear Deal as it has now come to be recognized, needed a tremendous amount of work over an extended period. Raja Mohan traces the engagement that had commenced after the nuclear tests of 1998 during the Clinton-Vajpayee period and culminated in the Agreement of July 2005, to be followed by the formal Agreement during President Bush's visit to India in 2006. What comes through the painstakingly reconstructed sequence of events, is the continuity in strategic policies pursued singlemindedly by both the Vajpayee and Manmohan Singh governments. That is proof, if it was needed, that at the highest levels of political leadership India has been well served in the strategic arena. Political convenience and rhetoric often obscures that strategic continuity for the uninitiated. This book shows that Indian interests have remained paramount in the calculations of India's high political leaders.

Raja Mohan takes the reader through the entire gamut of developments from the year 1998 till 2006. The account gets more exciting by the chapters as the narration, based extensively on personal and official statements, builds up a tempo leading to the final moments of the Bush visit to India. The important milestones of the Talbott-Jaswant Singh talks, with Brajesh Mishra taking over the process and bringing the much needed vigour and persistence to the effort are laid out at some length. The lead up to the Next Steps in Strategic Partnership (NSSP) and how that turned into Colin Powell's Glide Path, the turns and tumbles the negotiation process went through make for a lively read. The arrival of Condoleeza Rice on the scene, and the role played behind the scenes by the much misunderstood Donald Rumsfeld, provides new insights into the sequence of events. The lead up to the Defence Framework Agreement signed by Pranab Mukherjee makes another marker in the journey towards the final outcome. When the Defence Framework was inked, there was considerable anxiety in India about signing away rights and autonomy to American interests. Raja Mohan's narration shows how these separate and seemingly disparate elements formed part of an overall plan.

There can be another view that questions the logical sequence that is made out in the book of the long process, through two Indian governments and the Clinton and Bush administrations. One can be tempted to wonder if the leaders and the officials really had such a clearly laid out road map. This is especially true in the light of Raja Mohan's own account of the surprise denouement the night before the White House meeting in July 2005. The juxtaposition of individual initiatives, team work and the strategic vision of Bush and Manmohan Singh through a fine reconstruction of events, however makes a persuasive case for Raja Mohan's analysis. As things develop in the ongoing pulls and pressures in the US Congress on the deal, we shall know more of such issues. What is clear from the skilful juxtaposition of facts and analysis in the book is of both India and US, working on the conviction of their mutual strategic interests being well served by the nuclear deal. They have also, as stated by Secretary Rice at the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearings, strengthened the nuclear global nonproliferation arrangements.

The nuclear isolation of India that had held its relations with US hostage for decades had to be ended. This realization in Washington and New Delhi was a major strategic turning point in the history of India-US relations. It was in fact the culmination of the process of re-positioning India that had started after the collapse of Soviet Union and India's own near economic collapse in 1989. This repositioning with its strategic and economic shifts had been started by Narasimha Rao and Manmohan Singh. Vajpayee and Jaswant Singh stayed on that course. It is in a way apt that Manmohan Singh brought that process of repositioning India in the new international order to its present advantageous juncture. Today, India is in the enviable position of having stable relations with all major military and economic powers. It is a condition that had been five decades in coming and one that is to be valued and sustained. Those who decry this strategic situation on the basis of outmoded ideological beliefs, would do well to note Raja Mohan's perspectives on the future.

The book concludes by looking ahead at both the gains and future risks inherent in the new relationship that is being constructed between India and the US. If, as Manmohan Singh reminds Indians frequently, the future lies in sustained economic and technological growth, India can ill afford to be without a solid relationship with the US. The US leads the world, and despite occasional spells of delusion, about its military ability to set the world right, would continue to lead the world. Its real power, of its capacity to do good, is an asset to Indian strategic needs. India on the other hand believes, to use Raja Mohan's phrase, 'in marching to its own drummer'. The two great nations will need to work on each other's strengths. That is the strategic need of the future. The nuclear deal is one part of that larger strategic mosaic. In reiterating that essential argument, the book makes a very valuable contribution.■

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Possible Scenarios

Eric Gonsalves

THE SECOND BUSH PRESIDENCY: GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES
Edited by Amit Gupta and Cherian Samuel
Pearson Longman, 2006, pp. 212, Rs. 499.00

There is consensus that America is the only superpower, and that no one can prevent it from going its chosen way or hold it accountable. After 9/11 the voices of dissent and criticism were largely silenced in America and abroad. That has given the US President almost unlimited discretion and immunity from scrutiny. This book brings together views from around the world outlining possible scenarios during Bush's second Presidency. One major issue, which deserves more pace, is whether the role of civil society in US decision making can and 'll be restored, and how this could play out in the next two years, and r Bush. Another subject, which needs more attention, is the future of ierica's relations with the Islamic world. These are certainly in the orefront of Bush's foreign policy. Although it is impossible and unwise to club the Islamic world together and see it from any single viewpoint, a contributor from the Middle East would have helped make the survey more comprehensive. There is no contribution on international institutions, but that is understandable given the disinterest shown by Bush in them.

Since the Constitution was amended to limit a US president to two terms, there has been not only a discontinuity between Presidents, but also subtle changes of emphasis during a second term when the President is running not for re-election, but for his place in history. Bush undoubtedly sees himself as an imperial President who set out to overcome terrorism and put rogue states in their place. But the major dilemma he has created is stated in the book's last sentence: "The options for foreign policy makers, to put it simplistically, are to marry their interests to that of the United States, wherever possible, or to hold their noses and wait it out till the next round of elections in the hope that a more benign administration will come to power." That may however be too stark a choice. America may not change all that much after Bush, and the wiser choice may be to further one's interests by making selective alliances where interests converge.

The American contributor Daniel Sneider argues that Bush won the 2004 election because the American electorate did not want a change in leadership during a war, and the majority were led to believe that in any case Bush was a more resolute leader. This implies no major change in US attitudes in the long term. The German contributor, Braml however believes that the Christian Right has consolidated its position and will continue to play an influential role in America even after Bush has gone. Dobson from Britain also cites this as a concern that is echoed by Kirton from Canada. Republican candidates for the Presidency appear to be taking this seriously. Post 9/11 a move to the right that was already evident in US politics received a major boost from a shocked people who had been convinced they were immune from external threat. In earlier times the resilience of American society has turned back such drifts towards intolerance as in the time of McCarthy and Nixon. Today there are stronger murmurs of dissent such as the article criticizing the Israeli lobby enabling that country's interests to override America's, and criticism of the Iraqi war no longer being seen as disloyalty to the soldiers in the battlefield. It is however unlikely that the traditional internationalists who formed the bipartisan consensus for US foreign policy since World War II will ever be restored to the driving seat. The majority of the US public still appears paranoid over threats from Islamic fundamentalism and nuclear proliferation from every quarter that are often based on concocted facts and hype put out by interested parties which includes the media think tanks and even the government at times. The coalition between the neo-cons, the Christian right, and the Israeli lobby seems set to continue for quite a while. The disenchantment with Bush which growing fast may not affect this trend materially as long as his failures are attributed to bad judgement rather than ideology.

So far the parlous state of the US economy, with enormous and growing deficits at home and abroad, has not been fully appreciated by the US voter. Should the economy be forced down into a hard landing it can be anticipated that there will a backlash against the Administration as well as against major economic partners. If one needs to insure against American disillusion it must be on economic as well as security grounds. Friends and allies must be as wary as opponents.

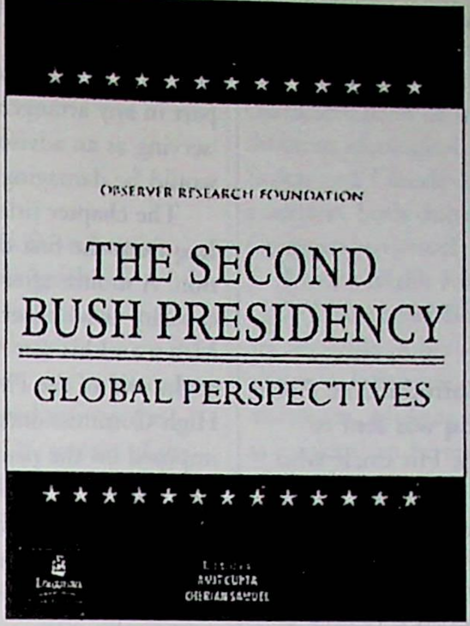
History will now judge Bush by the eventual outcome in Iraq, which can only be said to be uncertain. Had he declared victory after Afghanistan as his father did after Kuwait he might have been more fortunate. The flowering of democracy in the Middle East, which was touted as a major plank in the 2004 campaign is also a lost cause. The present structure in the region relies on authoritarian regimes that are the staunchest of Bush's allies and only verbally oppose Israel's policy and actions. Hamas in Palestine or the present Iranian regime, which are more genuinely democratic in their mandate, are seen as rouge entities. Israeli security and survival can and should have priority, but it seems that in the post 9/11 period pre-emptive and exclusivist policies are all that Israel has to offer and they will prevail as the US underwrites them and the international community remains passive. The road map for a viable Palestinian state is as essential for genuine peace in the region as permanent security for Israel. The wave of terrorism that the entire world is battling has much of its origin in the ferment in the societies and politics of the Middle East. It has an Islamic face, but as events in India have demonstrated democracy can counter it. Given the importance of this region for the world's energy security, its short term and long term stability are everyone's concern.

Added to this is the stand off between Iran and the US over the former's nuclear programme. Iran's hands are probably not clean. But then whose are? Almost certainly there was clandestine assistance from the West to Israel's programme. The world urgently needs to find alternative energy sources, and nuclear power is again becoming attractive. Can a determined nation be prevented forever from acquiring dual use technology for enrichment even with the strictest of safeguards? The answer in the long term seems to be "no". If so, would it not be better to go down the Russian route of allowing a small amount of domestic enrichment? Thereafter by increasing international involvement the Iranians could be held to their commitments and the number of nuclear weapon powers might be kept down. There is one doubt that is difficult to set aside. The real cap to proliferation lies in comprehensive nuclear disarmament.

India's own stability and prosperity is dependent on developments in this region. We cannot stand aside because we are "non-aligned" or blindly support US initiatives. It is necessary to develop our own linkages with the region as effectively as possible, so as to influence US policy constructively along with other key players. The only touchstone should be our interests. That is the only way to gain respect and influence in the long term.

The Europeans are making themselves irrelevant in world affairs as they find themselves immersed in their domestic problems, divided in their attitudes to Bush, and in establishing a consensus on the future of the European Union. For a time the momentum and the depth of their economies will give them some voice. Maybe some day they will bounce back. For the present they have the choice to be allies or critics while Washington just takes them all for granted as all the European contributors agree. The Canadian contribution illustrates the almost pathetic state of the nearest neighbour and ally who now finds it relegated to irrelevance in the making of US policy even while its fate may well be decided by events flowing from that policy over which it has no control.

Pro-American regimes are steadily being replaced in Latin America but most of them, as the Brazilian contributor points out, do not want to be at loggerheads with Washington. Nor can they afford to be with their economies so largely connected to America. Castro has managed to preserve his independence at considerable cost. And Chavez is scripting a new scenario with his oil wealth giving Venezuela greater freedom of action, and his largesse allied with economic policies no longer dictated from Washington enabling his neighbours to act with more independence. Latin America will gradually become a less dependent backyard. India needs to cultivate this region as assiduously as the Chinese.



Russia is placed between Europe and Asia. While the leadership there is almost reconciled to the loss of super power status, it still reckons that it merits a special status. This is theoretically based on its Eurasian geography, and in reality to its special links with the new states that emerged from the break up of the Soviet Union. This has been effectively challenged by growing US influence in all these states and regime changes engineered in several by internal political processes. Russia has been able to claw back some of its position because of the dependence of these countries on her in the energy field, and by playing the game of domestic politics with greater finesse. Russia is also engaging more effectively with many of the old neighbours of the Soviet Union like China, India, Iran and Turkey. There is however common ground with the US on terrorism although the targets are different with opinions not quite coinciding on Chechnya and the Middle East and Iran. Russia remains anxious to collaborate with America in world affairs, but is dissatisfied with the unwillingness of the US to accept her inputs in decision-making.

It is however in Asia that the major shift in US policy is being seen, as the continent becomes a major economic military and political powerhouse. China has become the second world power even if its reach is still regional, and it is seen by the US as a challenger in the years to come n all fields. There is disquiet over the Chinese stand on Taiwan and its possible emergence as a hegemon in the Asia Pacific theatre. Moreover China holds a key position in managing the problem of North Korea's nuclear threat, and considerable leverage along with Russia on Iran. The bilateral economic exchanges are so enormous and so much in China's favour that they too are seen as a growing threat. However these are so vital to the continued economic well being of both countries that it is likely that the needs of interdependence there will allow them to be managed somewhat autonomously. Rhetoric about democracy and human rights is mouthed by the US, but these seem to be symbolic. As the Chinese contributor concludes confrontation will find no winners and cooperation no losers, but as he acknowledges China will have to live with a combination of engagement and containment, and the Chinese appear to believe that with time and patience they will eventually reach their destiny as the world's first power.

The first chapter by Amit Gupta is the most interesting and not only for an Indian audience, as he outlines a major shift in American priorities towards India. Just as the Kissinger visit to Beijing in 1971 signalled a major change in the world's power equations, the Manmohan Singh and Bush visits in 2005-6 do signal another shift in America's priorities, which will affect the power calculus. He gives a clear and concise summary of the evolution of India's worldview. He is quite right in claiming that present circumstances provide for an exciting new beginning in Indo-US relations, and that India must play its cards well to gain full advantage of the opportunities being offered to gain great power status. However, how far India needs to go in accommodating US interests is better done on a case by case basis and not "by forgoing traditional alliances and taking a more proactive role in extra regional security". The negotiation of the nuclear deal during Bush's visit indicates that readiness to stand up and safeguard the national interest allied with a genuine effort to find common ground is the only way to build that lasting Indo-US relationship that has eluded us since Independence. The world around us is changing and knee-jerk anti-Americanism makes no more sense than claiming a special relationship. Undoubtedly American interest in a strategic partnership is based on power equations in Asia, but those power equations have been forged by development at home in almost all of Asia and especially in India and China. Accepting India's nuclear weapon power status is on a par with the "one China" proposition accepted by Nixon. The challenge before the Indian and American leaderships lies in strengthening the strategic partnership in all fields without surrender by India of her perceived interests. There is need too for the US to go further in actually supporting Indian interests in her immediate neighbourhood.

With Pakistan and South Asia the US needs to concede much more than it does in heeding India's lead. It does have some need to rely on Pakistan in security matters, and hence to allow Musharaff and his Army a role for a time could be accepted by India. But the present US policy to permit a freeze on progress to democracy and support the jehadis in Afghanistan and Kashmir is to guarantee future instability in the region. This may be of little concern to Bush, but India and his successors must be more far sighted in their own interests. Similarly attempts to play a lone role in Bangladesh and Nepal will only increase intransigence in the first and instability in the second. India should be willing to undertake a lead role while she accepts advice where possible from the West who has useful leverage.

The Asian equation will have to be one that includes China, India and the US with an optimum of cooperation, an element of competition, but no confrontation as India and China have a vested interest in the development of an Asian system in which they work together. Thus we will be a player rather than a mere counter in any future "Great Game" in our continent.

A very constructive idea is that India should develop its soft power to become the school hospital and office of the region and later the world. We will also have to become a factory because there is no other way to become a great power and to provide employment to the majority of school leavers. Unfortunately this is an alien idea to the political elite who has refused to invest in primary education and see reservations in higher education as a vote bank. A putative great power cannot be built on shaky social foundations. Education, health and opportunity must be provided to every child as well as centres of excellence, which will attract the best students from the world. We have a lead in the many excellent institutions we have built, the abilities in English, and the proportion of youth in the population. This has to be nurtured and not squandered to get votes.

As is inevitable one has some disagreement with some of the conclusions arrived at in this book. Nevertheless it is a valuable contribution to understanding the totally different power pattern that is emerging in the world with one superpower which cannot however act unilaterally with impunity, and emerging great powers that have to take American attitudes into account and yet try to make the world a better place according to their own judgement. All the talented contributors have brought to bear national perspectives with unusual clarity and insight.■

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Overrunning a Nation

K.P. Fabian

BUSH IN BABYLON: THE DECOLONIZATION OF IRAQ
By Tariq Ali
Left Word Books, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 262, Rs. 195.00

For the global citizen, Tariq Ali needs hardly any introduction. Born in Lahore into a Communist family in 1943, Tariq was sent to England for studies, mainly for his personal safety. His uncle who headed the military intelligence was convinced that his nephew stood a good chance of being incarcerated in Pakistan, even running the risk of getting killed by the state. Tariq flourished in Oxford and became president of the Oxford Union in 1965. At the time of the global outrage against America's war on Vietnam, Tariq became famous with his much publicized debate with Henry Kissinger.

There is a historical depth in Ali's book that is so refreshing and rare. The book was first published in 2003 in London. The author has written an introduction to the Indian edition. *"The account of Iraqi history offered in this book is a painful one. No happy endings are in sight."* In 1258, Baghdad fell to the Mongols. A conversation between the Mongol chief Hulegu and the fallen Caliph, as recorded by philosopher al –Tusi (d.1274) is interesting:

> The King(Hulegu) went to examine the Caliph's residence and walked about it in every direction. The Caliph was fetched and ordered presents to be offered. Whatever he brought out the King at once distributed amongst his suite and emirs, as well as among military leaders and all those present. He then set a golden tray before the Caliph and said: 'Eat!'
> 'It is not edible', said the Caliph.
> 'Then why didst thou keep it', asked the King, 'and not give it to thy soldiers? And why didst thou not make these iron doors into arrow-heads and come to the banks of the river so that I might not have been able to cross it?'
> 'Such,' replied the Caliph, 'was God's will.'
> 'What will befall thee,' said the King, 'is also God's will.'

Can we imagine a similar conversation between George Bush and Saddam Hussein?

The first chapter following the introduction is titled 'The Jackals' Wedding' after a poem of the same title by Saadi Youssef, a patriotic Iraqi poet living in exile in Damascus as the American occupiers have prohibited his entry. In southern Iraq, on a summer's night, in order to recover from the day's heat, people in the villages often sleep in the open air, underneath a star-lit sky. "Their peace is sometimes disturbed by a conclave of noisy jackals, some engaged in mating, others clamouring to be next, and a few simply quarrelling. After an hour or more it reaches a climax. By this time the noise and the stench is unbearable. Suddenly, the animals depart. Next time they will meet elsewhere, but wherever and whenever they do, the villagers recall, with disgust, the nights disturbed by a 'jackals' wedding'. For Tariq Ali, the Interim Governing Council appointed by the occupier, resembled a jackals' wedding.

Thanks to cyber connectivity, the poem of Saadi Youssef reached Baghdad and Basrah within minutes and many Iraqis started referring to the Interim Council as the jackals' wedding. The poem ends on a defiant note:

> I'll spit in the jackals' faces,
> I'll spit on their lists,
> I'll declare that we are the people of Iraq-
> we are the ancestral trees of this land,
> proud beneath our modest roof of bamboo.

Tariq Ali considers that all Iraqi collaborators belong to a single party, ICP, the Iraqi Collaborators' Party. Adnan Pachachi, the temporary speaker of the Iraqi parliament has been a collaborator. But before the invasion, he told the *Financial Express* (March3,2003) he declined to take part in any arrangements for a post-Saddam Iraq for the reason that 'serving as an advisory body attached to a US military administration would be damaging and unacceptable."

The chapter titled 'An Oligarchy of Racketeers' sums up the history of Iraq from the first decade of the twentieth century till the 1958 revolution. A month after the First World War began, Lord Kitchener in his capacity as Minister for War, sent a hand-written letter to the Sharif of Mecca and his son Abdullah. The Iraq that the British brought into being at the end of the First World War was a colonial state with the British High Commissioner wielding real power. An outsider (Feisal) was imposed on the people as their king. Nuri al-Said, formerly an officer who served in the Ottoman Army, played Iago to Feisal's Othello. When Feisal protested at the overbearing attitude of his British protector, the High Commissioner "was unscrupulous in mobilizing sections of the Shia to protest against the Sunni ruler." Incidentally, much has been written about the oppression of the Shias under Saddam Hussein. But, it was the British who imported a Sunni ruler(sic) to a Shia majority country. The question arises in the mind of the reader whether the foreigners have anything to do with the growing sectarian violence in Iraq. Nuri became a "much despised political figure." A businessman informed a visiting historian that "politicians like Nuri and his gang were corrupt to the core, they were 'dogs and one best deals with dogs by tossing bones to them." Tariq Ali has given us a gripping account of the July 14(1958) Revolution that brought an end to the hold of Britain over Iraq exercised through a subservient monarchy. A few days before the Revolution the British Ambassador had informed the Foreign Office that "the situation was stable."

The 1958 Revolution was made possible because "Colonels and Communists" collaborated. It was to prove to be short-lived collaboration, partly because the Communists played their cards clumsily and partly because they were mistrusted by the nationalists who saw them as instruments of Moscow. The two major complaints against the Communists were that they had ceased all opposition to the British and French military once the Soviet Union was attacked by Hitler and had supported the formation of the state of Israel under Moscow's bidding. Later, Saddam Hussein pursued a policy of befriending the Soviet Union and at the same time outwitting the Iraqi Communists and virtually eliminating them from the political scene. They have now resurfaced in Iraq under Bush.

Tariq Ali's account of the origins of the invasion and occupation of Kuwait by Iraq under Saddam Hussein is much superior to what we have come across in many other books. He does make the point that Ambassador April Glaspie in her meeting with Saddam Hussein a few days before the Iraqi army entered Kuwait was "both ambiguous and misleading." But, he could have told the reader about the change in the war doctrine of the Central Command from prevention of a Soviet attack on the Arab oil fields to that of an Iraqi move to take over the oil fields in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, a change that was effected in early 1990. In fact, General Schwarzcopf the then head of the Central Command and the future Commander of the Coalition against Iraq had toured the Gulf capitals in the second quarter of 1990, months before the actual invasion, asking the heads of state about their reaction to such an eventuality. In other words, Washington was expecting Saddam Hussein to invade and occupy Kuwait months before he actually did.

In the final chapter 'Empires and Resistance', there is a catalogue, very useful albeit incomplete, of US aggression since 1944. It used to be said, *Publish or perish*. A good many of the books on Iraq have already perished. Tariq Ali's book will be read for years to come. Policy-makers in chancelleries in world capitals, including Washington, might benefit from reading this book. In any case, it is a pleasure to read the book, even if one does not agree with the author all the time.■

K.P Fabian is the author of *Commonsense on War on Iraq*.

Writing Twentieth Century History –From Colony to Nation: A Conference Report*

The very title of the conference suggests the focus on the transition from colony to nation. This is an important historiographical statement as the words colony and nation are not fashionable in certain circles. Even when this transition is looked at, the emphasis is on the continuities, not the sea-change that it marked. In contrast, this conference, spread over three days, twenty-four presentations, attempted to map the complex and fundamental nature of this transformation.The format of the conference was presentation of books, recently published, forthcoming and under preparation.

The wide variety of work presented all reflected an independent, non-colonial, secular tradition of history writing, which was indigenous without being indigenist.

Chairing the opening session, Professor Bipan Chandra set the tone with some important formulations. The national movement made the nation; the nation did not give rise to the national movement. Its significance was global, not merely national. It did not prescribe uniformity as other nationalisms did, it celebrated diversity.

Irfan Habib, in his inaugural presentation, expressed concern over the fact that in recent years the colonial interpretation of Indian economic history had resurfaced in works such as that of Tirthankar Roy, despite the fact that such interpretations when argued by colonial authorities or subsequently in some academic writings, (e.g., by Morris D. Morris in the 1960's and *The Cambridge Economic History* Vol II in the 1970s) were systematically demolished. He was shocked that Tirthankar Roy's *Oxford Economic History of India* is even prescribed as a text by institutions like the Delhi School of Economics. He explained that he wrote *The Indian Economy: 1858-1914,* so that issues like tribute (or drain of wealth from India) and deindustrialization as sources of economic exploitation do not disappear from the teaching of economics in Indian universities.

Agreeing with Habib's conclusions, Prabhat Patnaik urged a look at the drain from the point of view of its impact on the then global economy. He argued that colonial surplus appropriation was critical in British industrialization and that the British economy, once it faced competition from newly industrializing economies, relied heavily on the colonial connection to enable it to remain the world leader for a long period of time.

Mridula Mukherjee in her presentation of her book, *Colonializing Agriculture: The Myth of Punjab Exceptionalism*, critiqued the colonial view that Punjab 'prospered' under colonial rule and showed that Punjab exhibited the same tendencies towards underdevelopment that colonial structuring produced in other parts of the country such as Eastern India. If Punjab looked relatively better off, it was because the region came under colonial rule nearly a century later than many other parts such as Eastern India. Himadri Banerji, the discussant, felt that the generalizations made by Mridula Mukherjee were likely to lead to a review of the positions taken on Punjab's economic history. He also stressed that agricultural statistics of the colonial period needed to be treated with caution.

Presenting his book, *Imperialism, Nationalism and the Making of the Indian Capitalist Class*, Aditya Mukherjee critiqued the relationship between class, party and nation posited by the orthodox left in the colonial period, which saw the capitalist class as necessarily pro-imperialist, and the Congress as a party which acted at the behest of or on behalf of the capitalists and hence could not be fully anti-imperialist. He made a persuasive argument showing the complex, relatively autonomous relationships that exist between various classes and the party leading a multi-class national movement against imperialism.

Rajat Ray, discussing Mukherjee's book, drew attention to the convergence between Bipan Chandra, Aditya Mukherjee and himself on the characterization of Indian capitalists and the national movement despite different ideological positions held by them. Similarly, he argued, Sumit Sarkar and Claude Markovits, though they had different ideological positions, both dubbed capitalists as imperialist collaborators and the Congress as virtually a party of the bourgeoisie.

Medha Malik Kudaisya in her presentation of her book *Life and Times of G.D. Birla* traced Birla's evolution from his involvement with the revolutionary terrorists in his youth to his close association with Gandhiji and his efforts at influencing post-independence economic policy. Nasir Tyabji, the discussant, while appreciating the book felt that the author presented Birla as nobler than he really was.

In the session on communalism chaired by Siddharth Varadarajan, Salil Misra, Rakesh Batabyal and Bhupinder Yadav presented their work on U.P. and Bengal. Misra, while presenting his book, *A Narrative of Communal Politics: Uttar Pradesh, 1937-39,* questioned the obsession with Partition in most works on communalism and the 'didn't do enough' or 'should not have done this' type of explanations. D.N. Panigrahi, the discussant, seconded Misra's contention that Jinnah, not the Congress, had withdrawn from the coalition talks in U.P.

Batabyal cautioned against collapsing communalism with communitarianism, as is often done these days. Basudev Chatterji, the discussant for his book, *Communalism in Bengal: From Famine to Noakhali, 1943-47,* drew attention to confidential documents in the West Bengal State Archives which pointed to the culpability of Suhrawardy in the Calcutta killings of 1946.

Bhupinder Yadav located his study of *Communal Politics of Kanpur 1914-1947* in the context of other approaches to communalism exemplified by Gopal Krishna, W.W. Hunter, Paul Brass, Francis Robinson and Bipan Chandra. Socialist, communal and nationalist politics were interrelated in Kanpur. The Muslim League grew by embracing a whole spectrum of leaders, including Hasrat Mohani, and getting involved with the labour strike of 1938.

Rizwan Qaisar, the discussant, argued that lack of attention to Muslim organizations other than the Muslim League, such as, for instance, the Azad Muslim Conference, which attracted a crowd of over 50,000 for a meeting at which the Muslim League was condemned, led to an over-estimation of the importance of the Muslim League.

In the session on U.P., Antony Thomas, *Economic Times*, Gyanesh Kudaisya, National University of Singapore and Visalakshi Menon, Jesus and Mary College, Delhi University, presented their work. Thomas looked at *Provincial Autonomy and the Communal Problem: UP and Punjab, 1937-39.* It offered meaningful insights into how the communal problem was handled in two divergent situations; one province where the secular Congress was in power and another where the loyalist, semi-communal Unionists were in power. The discussant, Sucheta Mahajan, stressed the utility of comparative analyses in general and of UP and Punjab in this period in particular.

Presenting *Region, Nation and 'Heartland': Uttar Pradesh in India's Body Politic,* Kudaisya traced the making of U.P. by outlining five constructions of the 'heartland' — colonial, nationalist, Muslim, Hindu and post-independent. The discussant, Sudha Pai, found his delineation of the process by which present day U.P. was imagined and constituted very useful for her research in U.P. Visalakshi Menon presented her book, *From Movement to Government: The Congress in the United Provinces, 1937-42,* which explores the period of provincial autonomy in U.P., when the Congress was both a mass anti-imperialist movement and a government in power. Niraja Gopal Jayal, the discussant, wondered whether Congress being in power disabled or enabled the party in future movements. She was fascinated by the early experiments in institutions of self governance such as Congress panchayats.

In her presentation of her book, *Peasants in India's Non-Violent Revolution:Practice and Theory,* Mridula Mukherjee argued that the actual, mostly nonviolent, political practice of Indian peasants, in the era of the freedom struggle, refuses to fit into the straitjackets provided for it by

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* All the volumes presented at the Conference form part of the Sage Series in Modern Indian History. The report is by Sucheta Mahajan.

different theoretical models, including the subaltern. She has tried, in her work, which is based on a detailed study of peasant politics in Punjab, and a survey of peasant political behaviour in the rest of India, to evolve elements of an alternative framework.

Dipankar Gupta, the discussant, agreed that the subalternists were at variance with the anthropological perspective in their belief that elites and subalterns had separate mentalities. He was also very critical of James Scott's model of everyday resistance for its weak empirical base and for accepting the viewpoint of the exploiting classes who exaggerate resistance in order to legitimize repression. Rajat Ray felt that the very use of the word peasant was like moving into a minefield. The appropriate would be, for example, *raiya*, which was used in pre-colonial India, and included other rural residents such as the village merchant and the artisan.

Tan Tai Yong, author of *The Garrison State: The Military Government ands Society in Colonial Punjab,1849-1947,** focused on the legacy of the militarization of society in Punjab for postcolonial developments, especially in Pakistan. Bipan Chandra linked the very different trajectory of the Indian province of Punjab to the overall democratic framework in which it was placed. Sudha Pai added that right after independence in India civilian control was imposed on the army and the Defence Minister given a status higher than that of the services chiefs.

In the session on Western India and Orissa, Shri Krishan presented his book *Political Mobilization and Identity in Western India, 1934-47,* by taking up one strand, that of tribal mobilization, instead of summarizing the entire work. He highlighted the struggle of the Warlis in 1945-46.

Pritish Acharya unravelled the process of the making of the regional Oriya identity, showing how it was intertwined with the emergence of a national identity. Chandi Prasad Nanda focused on popular mobilization in Orissa in the 1930s and 1940s, highlighting the 1942 movement. As discussants, Amar Farooqui, Salil Misra and Visalakshi Menon, initiated a debate which soon moved from being animated to extremely contentious, as the issue was that of identity.

The session on Bihar had presentations by Lata Singh and Praveen Singh. Lata Singh presented her work on popular mobilization during the non-cooperation movement which was very comprehensively discussed by Girish Mishra. Lata Singh's focus on the police agitation brought out a very interesting fact that subordinate officials were sympathetic to the national movement as early as 1920-22. Praveen Singh dissected the adverse environmental impact of colonial irrigation and flood control policies in North Bihar. He showed how the colonial intervention substituted the traditional methods of flood control, which had served the needs of the peasantry quite adequately, and created a situation where in the long run the problem of floods got further exacerbated. Rohan D'Souza , the discussant, corroborated Praveen Singh's conclusions on the basis of his own work on the same theme in a neighbouring region, Orissa.

Sonali Jolly Wadhwa's presentation on the final day featured the new woman, poised on the threshold of modernity, as represented in Indian women's literature from 1950 to 2000. Malashri Lal, the discussant, described other literary works on this theme. Visalakshi Menon's presentation of her book, *Indian Women and Nationalism: The UP Story,* showed how nationalist women expressed their nationalism in diverse ways: some went to jail, which itself was a hugely liberating experience, while others, such as Mahadevi Verma, focused on women's education, which they saw as critical to women's empowerment. Taisha Abraham, the discussant, questioned what to her, a self-confessed postcolonial theorist, appeared an overly sympathetic rendering of the relationship between nationalism and women. Were not patriarchal and communal notions of the nation inscribed on the body of the woman?

In the session on Partition and Independence, chaired by Anita Inder Singh, Sucheta Mahajan, presenting her book, *Independence and Partition: The Erosion of Colonial Power in India*, said independence and Partition represented two sides of the same coin. Independence was the result of the success of the national movement in forcing the British to quit while Partition was the consequence of its failure to complete the process of nation in the making. Anita Inder Singh, discussing Mahajan's book, raised extremely important issues in her comments ranging from imperial strategy to loss of will to rule to differences between the colonial and post independent state on the issue of handling communalism.

Gargi Chakravarty profiled the heroic struggles of the refugee women of Bengal in her book *Coming out of Partition: Refugee Women in Bengal.* Drawing on oral histories, she traced their journey from railway station to relief camp to refugee colony. The discussant, Sucheta Mahajan, noted, among other points, that Gargi's refugees were not swept by communal sentiment as Punjabi refugees in Delhi were. They participated in secular and democratic politics.

Sukhmani Bal presenting her book, *Politics of the Sikhs: 1940-47,* showed how the demand for Khalistan emerged in the 1930s but did not receive the recognition the Pakistan demand did. Later, Azad Punjab emerged as an alternative, which was equally short-lived. Her story detailed the movement of Sikh communal politics from separatism to going along with the Congress to flirting with the League, all in an abortive bid to be recognized by the colonial state. Mohinder Singh pertinently pointed to the risk of pursuing minority politics; it could take a sectarian communal turn.

D.N. Gupta presented his work on the Communist Party of India in the period after the declaration of the Second World War. He unravelled the predicament they were placed in because the People's War line demanded support to the War because of the participation of the Soviet Union whereas the Indian people on the whole opposed the War as an imperialist war. Arjun Dev pointed out that the phrase anti-party line should not be used for Shourie and Limaye, they were anti-Communist, whereas the word anti-party was used by the party to dub internal detractors.

Neerja Singh in her presentation on the Congress right-wing questioned the use of the concept of the right wing on the basis of the European experience as it did not have the same meaning in India. In a colonial context, right wing could be as anti-colonial as the left wing. Right was not a term of self-definition, it was a pejorative term used by the left wing. Bipan Chandra commented on how important Neerja Singh's work was in demonstrating the need to evolve our own conceptual categories to comprehend Indian reality.

Amit Mishra placed his work on the diaspora, specifically indentured labour in Mauritius, squarely in the context of the colonial system, rather than within the format of push and pull factors . He went on to describe the attitude of the nationalists towards exploitation of these coolies. Gyanesh Kudaisya stressed the relevance of his work today, raising, as it did, important issues of citizenship.

The valedictory session was chaired by B.R. Nanda, who brought to bear his enduring reading of Gandhi and Indian nationalism. Bipan Chandra traced his intellectual journey from his early work on the moderates, *Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism in India,* to his reassessment of the national movement, particularly Gandhi, in his book *Indian National Movement: Long Term Dynamics* to his latest book *In the Name of Democracy: JP Movement and the Emergency.*

Bipan Chandra spoke of how, over time, he came to understand Gandhian strategy and tactics as a perfect example of the Gramscian notion of hegemonic struggle. He moved from an orthodox left position which underlined the necessity of a violent overthrow of the established regime before the setting up of a socialist order to a recognition of how the semi-hegemonic and semi-repressive nature of the colonial state in India necessitated an alternative strategy of counter hegemonic, non-violent struggle.

Discussing the books, Shantha Sinha said the JP book helped her realize the dangers of the anarchist orientation of the JP movement, its illegitimate demand for Mrs. Gandhi's resignation and the attempt to suborn army loyalty. *Long Term Dynamics* showed that cadres of the movement must return as celebrated heroes, not prisoners of war. Also, everyone had ownership of the movement, from the weakest to the strongest, there was no hierarchy of participation. Nonviolence ensured that there was place for dialogue, for waiting till a consensus was achieved. There was much to be learnt from the Gandhian struggles for movements today.■

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* See following review.

Colonial State And The Military Labour Market

Kamlesh Mohan

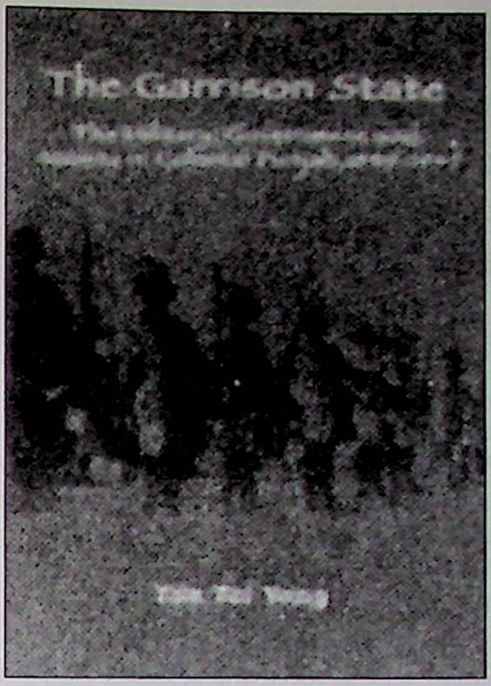
THE GARRISON STATE: THE MILITARY, GOVERNMENT AND SOCIETY IN COLONIAL PUNJAB 1849-1947
By Tan Tai Yong
Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 333, Rs.640.00

D.H.Kolff's pioneering study *Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy : The Ethno-History of the Military Labour Market in Hindustan, 1450-1850* (1990) has dealt with an unexplored aspect of medieval Indian economy. His aim is to investigate the contribution of manpower as a factor in the formation and upholding of the state. In order to understand the nature of medieval Indian economy, specifically its redistributive aspect, he has identified Rajputs as one of the major social groups in Eastern Hindustan or Purab who offered their soldiering services in the military labour market in North India. The soldiering tradition in this region (also known as Bhojpur) of North India yielded fighting men to Shershah Suri, the Mughal emperors and the British East India Company as well as to numerous minor rulers, warlords and zamindars. While discussing the growth of military labour market from mid-fifteenth to mid-nineteenth century, Kolff has analysed the historial role and political culture of these peasant-soldiers. One interesting aspect of his work is the use of folklore, which gives tantalizing glimpses of the images of Rajputs through the eyes of their women.

Tan Tai Yong's book under review also deals with the dynamics of the military labour market in the Punjab from 1849-1947 but from a different perspective and context.Unlike Kolff his object is to study the relationship of the colonial state with the army with an eye on the changing threat perceptions of the British rulers first from the virile and martial Punjabis and after the 1857 revolt from the Purbiyas as well as their security concerns, long term goals and policies. For him, the central concern is to explore and map out the extent and process of the militarization of bureaucracy, society and economy of the Punjab which was burdened with the responsibility of supplying man power and money without interruption.

The author begins with an examination of considerations, circumstances and compulsions which obliged the British to reverse the policy of demilitarization of the Punjabis after their unnerving experience of the 1857 upheaval and opening of certain districts of the Punjab as a recruiting ground for the Indian Army. It may be pointed out that the process of militarization of state and society in this region, though intensified by the demands of the colonial state, was built on the existing traditions of armed fighting (if need be) against injustice, tyranny and religious persecution as well as against foreign invaders who barged seventeen times through the open frontier of this region.

As a result, the Punjabis especially the Sikh Jat peasantry were obliged to cultivate a martial mentality, physical toughness and courage and love for sports. These qualities, coupled with their military training on the European model as recruits in Ranjit Singh's Army and their bravery in the two Anglo-Sikh wars had raised their value in the military labour market whose center had shifted from Eastern India, Bombay and Madras to the Punjab by the end of the 19th century. Keen to fill in the major gaps in research on the role played by the military in the economic development of colonial Punjab, the author has argued that there is enough scope for exploring the extent and processes through which the province had become militarized from the late 19th century onwards. While pursuing his enquiry, he has raised three major questions: (i) What was the nature of the relationship between the colonial army and the government in the Punjab? (ii) What was the nature of the military



labour market and how was demand (for the chosen martial castes) and supply (the readiness of preferred castes/tribes to enlist) in that market managed? Related with it was the query regarding appropriate means to sustain the loyalty of the crucial segment of man power. What was the nature of civil military equations in this unique 'garrison state' to use Yong's phrase.

In fact, the entire discussion in this study revolves around these three major questions. In order to provide answer to the first question, the author has discussed the post-mutiny army reforms in 1858 as recommended by the Peel Commission. The underlying principle of these reforms was to divide and rule, and prevent the natives from developing a spirit of camara, shared interests and sympathies. Such an advice from the Punjab Committee (consisting of John Lawrence, Herbert Edwardes – both being expert Punjab watchers and Neville Chamberlain) was based on the logic of filling the Indian Army with a wide variety of castes and religious communities in order to break the monopoly of high caste Brahmins and Rajputs in the Bengal Army. Its second recommendation emphasized localization of recruitment and service. The political object of the policy based on these two recommendations was two-fold:

(i) to make the army a safe instrument and prevent its various regiments from unifying against the British Government ;

(ii) to develop a special relationship between the colonial army and the rulers.

These reforms had a positive implication for the future of martial Punjabis especially Sikhs. As a result, the Sikhs found a permanent place in the reconstituted Bengal Army which recruited thirty-five percent soldiers from Punjab upto 1870.

The second phase of reforms, beginning in mid 1880s gave priority to fighting efficiency of recruits in view of the escalating tensions after the Second Anglo-Afghan War (1880) and gnawing suspicions regarding Russian invasion of India. In this climate of fear-psychosis, Lord Roberts as the new Commander-in-Chief of the Bengal Army based his reform proposals on the theory of 'Martial castes and races'. Without going into the merits of this theory, it may be said that a different kind of selection process was used to recruit warlike social groups and weed out the unsuitable elements. Thus, the period from 1885 to 1903 saw a growing demand and preference for Sikh Jats, Gurkhas, Pathans, Punjabi Muslim agriculturists and chiefs of tribes from the Salt Range Tract in the colonial Army. Recruitment of Ranghars was an exception. However, the principle of localization in recruitment and service remained in force. Reorganization of the Army on the basis of the martial race theory had positive implications for the special relationship between the preferred castes and the Punjab Government. In return for land-grants, *sanads* and titles, ex-soldiers and serving recruits pledged their whole-hearted support and loyalty, to the *Angrezi- Sarkar*.

The second question regarding the nature of the military labour market has been discussed in a very thorough manner. The author has argued that even the Punjabization of the Indian Army after the second phase of reforms did not broaden the social base of recruitment. Owing to the bias in favour of certain types of soldiers who were to be recruited and the localities from which they were to be drawn, the military labour market remained extremely restricted. In 1900, out of a total male

Tan Tai Yong's insightful study of the processes of the militarization of government, society and economy in the Punjab from 1849-1947 has enriched our understanding of the complexities of state formation in colonial India. His work has vindicated the relevance of research in regional history for configuring the continuities and departures in the career of nation-states in South Asia.

population of 11,255,986, just over 50,000 were in direct military service. In 1897, when the north became the main feeding area for the army, the total annual intake was no more than 4,500 according to the *Annual Caste Returns of the Indian Army*, lying in India Office Records.

Tan Tai Yong has explained the complexities of the selection process, based on the 'Martial Race theory' and the Military handbooks (produced by the Army Department) which were used as guide-books, or manuals for the selection of the 'right type of social and religious' men as recruits for the army. As a result, many regiments narrowed their selection to include soldiers only from "particular subcastes, class, tribes and localities" (p.71). For example, Sikhs, who were generally regarded as a 'Martial caste' and constituted a significant portion in infantry regiments of the Indian Army by 1880s, their numbers in service were not strikingly high when computed in proportion with their population. Recruitment handbooks specified the criteria for ideal recruits :

> ... in judging the values of tribes which supplied converts to Sikhism in the time of Guru Gobind Singh, who in fact formed the Singh people,...those tribes, who, though they now supply converts to Sikhism, did not do so then, cannot be considered (or it is inadvisable to consider) as true Sikhs. (Captain R.W.Falcon, *Handbook on Sikhs for Use of Regimental Officers*, Allahabad 1896, P-65).

Besides, the qualification of being true or Khalsa Sikhs, according to the official definition of 'Martial castes', their suitability was also adjudged in terms of the theory of environmental determinism. *Manuals for Recruiting Officers* described the Jat Sikhs from central Punjab as "hardy, strong and full of hardwork and the best quality of Sikhs for military purposes". Consequently, recruitment of Sikhs was virtually limited to the Majha area of Central Punjab and ninety percent of Sikh recruits were listed as Jat Sikhs. Mazhabi Sikhs, another noticeable group, were recruited as they had been elevated to an agricultural caste from a menial caste after they had been given land grants in the canal colonies. Yong has reinforced his argument by discussing the case of Punjabi Muslims especially the Gakkhar, Awan and Janjua tribes who enjoyed a high social status and belonged to the Salt Range tract.

As far as the means for sustaining the loyalty of 'Martial races' were concerned, these included awards, land grants, *sanads*, titles and other forms of patronage. For example, to keep these peasant-soldiers happy and contented, the British Government enacted legislative measures such as the Punjab Alienation of Land Act 1900-01, whose object was to save them from the menace of indebtednees. Another such step was the withdrawal of amendment to the original Punjab Colonization of Land Act, which provoked the agrarian agitation of 1907. Similarly, Akalis were assuaged by the Punjab Government in the course of the Gurdwara Reform Movement by avoiding to take a Pro-Mahant stand. Ultimately, Malcolm Hailey put an end to the Akali unrest by passing the Gurdwara Shrines Act of 1925. It is obvious that the British Government avoided any action which would alienate the 'Martial races and castes' owing to their tremendous value for the Indian Army.

For similar reasons local notables were given political importance as is evident from the provision of restricted franchise in order to ensure their numerical dominance in the Punjab Legislative Council.

The third major question concerns the nature of the equation between civil and military authorities. The growing demand for heavy recruitment of Punjabi soldiers to fight battles in France, Africa and Middle-East in the First World War (1914-1919) made the peace-time strategies for recruitment ineffective and inadequate. Civil-military cooperation was extremely necessary in order to exploit the recruiting potential to the fullest possible extent. The old system of recruitment, which carried out the recruitment process in a decentralized and poorly coordinated manner with the civil administration whose involvement remained nominal in practice. Moreover, the traditional catchment area showed signs of drying up owing to intensification of recruitment drive. Without going into more details about defects in the old system of recruitment, it may be emphasized that the new system, based on the recommendation of Michael O' Dwyer Lt. Governor of the Punjab (1912-1919), was introduced in the Punjab in December 1916 and later extended to the United Provinces and the rest of India. Under the new system, known as the 'territorial system' recruiting areas were redrawn to correspond with the administrative divisions. The most important feature of the revised system was the integration of the military function of recruiting into the civil administrative structure. It led to the assumption of direct control of recruiting operations in the province by the functionaries of civil administration. It had also given a very important advantage to the military authorities. Unlike the army, civil administration had a structural framework which was not only province-wise but also penetrated into every level of society. Thus, civil-military integration facilitated the recruiting operations in all twenty-eight districts, though there was variation in exploitation of manpower. Under the new system, "the entire line of the civil hierarchy from the Lieutenant Governor in Lahore to the Lambardar in the village was utilized for the purpose of mobilization"(p.116). Obviously the new territorial recruiting system in the Punjab now functioned as an integrated multi-tiered structure. I shall not go into the details regarding its mechanism including war associations and committees.

One major change, caused by civil military integration, was the militarization of bureaucracy and local notables in colonial Punjab. From 1916-1919 the Punjab 'home-front' was virtually governed by a military bureaucracy, whose tentacles reached into every level of society and economy. Tan Tai Yong has rightly remarked that "the direct assumption of a military function by the Punjab Government, and its intrusion into society on behalf of the military during the war, was to mark the beginning of a quasi-military state in the Punjab" (p.140). Their integration continued after the war in order to maintain the military districts amidst the turmoil of social and economic problems, created by demobilization and political change. It may be pointed out that civil-military integration was to become a permanent feature of political life in one of the successor states — Pakistan.

Another outcome of this unique civil-military relationship in the Punjab was the emergence of an influential rural military lobby. By demonstrating their indispensability to the military and state during the war, they strengthened their positions by the acquisition of land grants, titles and appointments in the civil and military service for themselves and their followers. These elites subsequently constituted themselves as the Punjab Unionist Party.

Tan Tai Yong's insightful study of the processes of the militarization of government, society and economy in the Punjab from 1849-1947 has enriched our understanding of the complexities of state formation in colonial India. His work has vindicated the relevance of research in regional history for configuring the continuities and departures in the career of nation-states in South Asia. Its significance is three-fold. Firstly, it has added a new dimension to the ongoing debate on the nature of the colonial state which has been viewed either as coercive(Bipan Chandra 1980; S.S.Bhattacharya, 2004) or hegemonic (Bhagwan Josh 1992). The colonial state in the course of its development did not crystallize into one single model.

The author has shown conclusively that the imperial imposition of the

role of being the 'swordarm' of the British empire upon the Punjab deflected the course of its development as a civil society. Unlike other provinces, it was developed as a unique civil-military regime during the first half of the twentieth century. The colonial state's anxious concern with the management of this region as the main recruiting ground for the Indian Army resulted in putting the burden of supplying canon fodder upon its 'martial races'. A strong nexus between the civil and military functionaries was maintained during the interwar years in order to insulate the 'military districts' from external political influences – Ghadrite, revolutionary and Congress propaganda. It was reinforced by the establishment of local political structure i.e. legislative council following the implementation of the recommendations of Montagu-Chelmsford Report (1919) and grant of full Provincial Autonomy under the Government of India Act of 1935. Numerical domination of the rural political elite, achieved through restricted Franchise with the tacit approval and intervention of the British rulers, further widened the communication gap between the nationalist leaders, landed-elites and peasant soldiers who could retain their land grants, *inams* and titles on the condition of their continued support and loyalty to the British Government.

Secondly, the troublesome political legacy of the civil-military nexus in this region had been reinforced through the collaboration of elected government. Under the banner of the Punjab Unionist Party which mobilized men and money for defence of the British empire during the Second World War. I would endorse Ayesha Jalal's view (1990) that militarization of state, society and economy, through the co-option of Muslim rural-military elite in the western, Sikh Jat peasant proprietors in the central and Hindu Jat land owners in the south east Punjab, played a decisive role in the emergence and formation of the postcolonial state in Pakistan: perpetuation of the dominance of the Punjabi controlled feudal military oligarchy was also a consequence of the political inheritance of the colonial policies. Of course, interplay of domestic, regional and international factors have also facilitated the entrenchment of social, political and economic power in the hands of landed-families, military and bureaucracy.

Thirdly, the poor response of the Punjabis to the Congress-led movements has been attributed to the Punjabi's faith in the paternal image of the Punjab Government and its officials. It had been carefully projected and upheld through close contact between the people and the government during the nineteenth century. It was perpetuated by the civil-military regime as the government continued to function through the District Soldiers Boards as the *maibap* to the population of the 'military districts'. It may be pointed out that the relationship between the colonial state and its military constituency in rural areas had always hinged on a 'precarious balance of vested interests' as shown by Tan Tai Yong through examples of Punjabi Muslim and Sikh rural elite. For example in the Salt Range Tract, Jhelum District Muslim peasantry whose dependence upon earnings from military service as the sole means of survival left them no choice but to be loyal and supportive.However, the Muslim, Sikh and religious elites were motivated to become collaborators owing to their expectation of more substantial gains and patronage. Thus, Yong's analysis has added a new dimension to the insights of G.A.Heeger in his article 'Growth of Congress Movement in the Punjab, 1920-40(1072).

The agriculturalists in the Majha tract, who had many options of earning a livelihood lost their enthusiasm for military service during the Second World War after learning about the tribulations and risks faced by their brethren in the foreign lands. It may be pointed out that religious fervour as in the case of the Akali movement, pull of patriotic feelings in the case of the Babbar Akalis and the strong impact of Marxist ideas in the case of Kirti-Kisan Party activists indicate that lure of material benefits from the British rulers gradually lost their appeal.

It is difficult to agree with Tan Tai Yong that the civil-military regime had insulated the Punjab from major communal disturbances or anti-government agitations. A number of specialists in communal politics in the Punjab have argued that triangular religious competition in this region intensified by the British politics of creating enumerative religious communities through census operations and police reservation of seats in legislative bodies had vitiated relations between Hindus, Muslim and Sikhs. The short term unity of internist engineered by the rural military elite on the political front, could not survive under the pressure of the powerful lobby of Muslim League and Akali party. This problem requires more critical analysis.

In the end, I would like to recommend the book under review to scholars and researcher in the history of nation–states and civil society in South Asia especially India and Pakistan. Sage publications deserve great praise for its slick and flawless production.■

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Mahdi Hasan Khan's London

Shobhana Bhattacharji

AN INDIAN PASSAGE TO EUROPE: THE TRAVELS OF FATH NAWAZ JANG
Edited by Omar Khalidi
Oxford in Asia Historical Reprints, Oxford University Press, 2006, pp.188, Rs.450.00

Mahdi Hasan Khan (MHK) was among the outsiders Salar Jung I, Diwan of Hyderabad, brought in when he reformed the state administration. He belonged to Fathpur, now in Barabanki district, UP. From a prosperous Avadhi Shia family, he was educated at Canning College, Lucknow, trained to become a revenue officer and lawyer, and married Ellen Gertrude Donnelly, daughter of an Irishman living in Lucknow. He arrived in Hyderabad in 1883 with a letter of recommendation from Sayyid Ahmad Khan the day after Salar Jung died, was nevertheless appointed Chief Revenue and Judicial Officer for the area around Hyderabad, and rose rapidly to become Chief Justice, then Home Secretary. The title of Fath Nawaz Jang was conferred on him. In 1888, he was sent to London in connection with a case concerning the Hyderabad Mining Company. He kept a detailed diary of his year long travels. The journal was published in London for private circulation and later translated by his friend Aziz Mirza as *Gulgasht-I Firang*. When he was away, the Diwan's opponents attacked those perceived to be his men. They began with MHK whose wife was accused of sleeping with British officers to further her husband's career. To his credit, he did not divorce her, even though he was dismissed from service in 1893. He returned to Lucknow where he started legal practice in partnership with Sayyid Mahmud, Sayyid Ahmed Khan's son. Born about 1852, MHK died in 1904 and was buried in Fathpur.

MHK travelled through Egypt, England, Scotland, France, Switzerland and Italy, but is best on London: "It is a mighty nation, and London is a mighty city." One could travel for miles without getting out of it; its streets were clean and wide, and "In the centre there is often a lamp-post on which is hung a board with the inscription, 'Keep to the left'" (p.4). He describes newspapers as if he were Darwin on the Beagle seeing strange insects for the first time. In his view, this odd creature, the newspaper is chiefly meant to pass the time. He cannot get over the thousands of people walking to and fro, in the trains, in omnibuses, in the parks, and for whose convenience wide pavements have been built. But sometimes, he says, the roads get so crowded, a pedestrian cannot

cross them without the help of a policeman. Theatres, music halls, art galleries, and museums are to him evidence of how highly cultured the British are, as are the parks, where "thousands of ladies and gentlemen" can be seen every afternoon, while on Sundays swarms of "poorer people" visit them. He shows no awareness of how recent these institutions of the democratized culture were. People are proficient on bicycles, which they ride for thousands of miles on the continent, and they are not scared to weave adeptly in and out of London traffic on them. Much of this is in the well-laid out preface to his journal. The journal itself veers between detailed descriptions and stilted vagueness ("This evening I went to a place out of town; the green pastures, with small rivulets here and there, and long lanes were very romantic. In such an atmosphere the dullest of men would become a poet." p.123). The English are wonderfully courteous, and the higher the person's class, the more gracious their manners. He is impressed by the poise of English women and children. Always comparative in his observations, he adds that Indian Muslim women and children would benefit from similar social freedom. Showing off technology via films was used by French colonial administrators after WW I to demonstrate to subject African nations the unassailable supremacy of white nations,[1] and what really impresses MHK is British science and technology, as if it existed to make him admire the British more than he already did.

He comments more than once about Muslims abroad. Lascars on the steamer out were Muslims, so were servants he met elsewhere in Africa and England. Thinking of the time when Arab Muslims were masters of the world, he is distressed by the present fallen status of Muslims, although in his letters to *The Times*, claiming that he spoke for all Muslims, he opposed the formation of the National Congress, thus infuriating the Indian press, whereupon he wrote another letter, in which he said, "We Mahomedans are by nature the worshippers of Royalty and aristocracy — a most barbarous feeling, you will say, but there it is" (p.172). Having been rulers of India, Mohamedans sympathize with the British because they know what it means to rule such a various people; they also acknowledge that Hindus are superior to them in intellectual education, therefore neither can rule the other. By his third letter, he was raging against "a low-class of unprincipled" Englishmen who sought to be powerful by playing one community against the other; and that, he said, was why Indians were angry with the British. Presumably, sending a better class of Englishman to India would have kept the Empire intact.

MHK admired Wilfred Scawen Blunt, who, the note tells us, did a lot to further education for Muslims, women in particular. What it does not tell us is that Blunt, poet, traveller, and politician, jailed in Dublin in 1888 for his pro-Irish protests, was grandson-in-law to Byron, who, as we all know, is virtually the originator of British travel writing. Part of the excitement of studying the newly recognized genre of travel writing is how to classify the emerging archive and its astonishing statistics, e.g., between 1600-1857, about twenty thousand Indians of many different social classes travelled to Britain, but they were mainly lascars, coolies, and nannies, who left few written records (see p.xi).

It is still a new enough discipline to see whether useful definitions come out of comparing two writers. How, for instance, does Byron's *Childe Harold* differ from MHK's kind of travel writing? Byron and MHK are constantly aware that they have been to places their readers have not. They want to educate their readers about these places. It is not just the excitement of visiting new places that they communicate but also a sense of superiority the travels create in them. Still, Byron is not really a teacher type, whereas MHK definitely is. This is probably the difference between their travel writing. Byron's musings in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* prevent it from being purely a travelogue. At least, they restrict readership, whereas MHK's travel brochure type of writing extends the readership in space and time. A special education wasn't required to follow it when it was first published, and 120 years later, it doesn't need special reading skills or footnotes as Byron's poem does.

MHK talks about a London that had become a well-settled large city. He doesn't have a sense of how recently things have changed. How could he? His purpose is to document it for his countrymen who have not seen it and may never do so, so he presents it like a tourist guide, and newness becomes a thing perceived by an outsider, whereas when mapmakers of 1799, and even Byron a decade or so later, mention new roads, bridges, or buildings, "new" marks the change from the old, for London was being radically rebuilt at the time. Between MHK's and Byron's London lies the change from the late 18th century to something close to the 20th century. 1888 is a wonderful date. A hundred years after Byron's birth, 200 years after Alexander Pope's, it is the year T.S.Eliot was born. The next year, 1889, several 20th century icons were born: Hitler, Charlie Chaplin, Nehru, and my grandmother. By then London was being photographed so that Byron-style details (in *Don Juan*, the Shooter's Hill description) were beginning to fall out of literature to be replaced by famous impressionistic accounts, such as T.S.Eliot's in *The Wasteland*. MHK's journal is in another genre altogether, the magnificent empirical mode of the Gazetteers invented by the 19th century English bureaucrat in India.

Only the best travel literature tempts the reader into digression, and it's a pity that really careless proofing mars this lively book, but the question is, what makes it lively? What distinguishes great travel writing from the rest? How much of its greatness is to do with readers? Do readers who carry clear visual images of places in their heads put up with a greater degree of obfuscation on the writer's part? Are writers who interpret places and experiences better than those who do not analyse so openly although they may describe things in relation to their own country or the experience of readers they have in mind? What separates 19th century travel writing from late 20th century travel writing? Is it the greater emphasis in the 19th century on the world out there? Or is it "a certain openness to surprise, an acknowledgement of the limits of the knowingness of the witness?"[2] Now there's a theme for a *TBR* issue.■

Reference

1 See Jean-Claude Carrière, *The Secret Language of Film*, trans. Jeremy Leggatt (New York: Random House, 1994), 3.

2 Amitav Ghosh, Foreword to *Other Routes: 1500 Years of African and Asian Travel Writing*, ed Tabish Khair et al (Oxford: Signal Books, 2006), ix.

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Book News	Book News

Slivers of a Mirror: Glimpses of the Ghazal by Shama Futehally attempts to capture the hypnotic rhythm and the exquisite interweaving of human and divine love which are the hallmark of the Urdu ghazal through the renderings of the great masters of this genre of music.
MapinLit, an imprint of Mapin Publishing, Ahmedabad, 2005, pp.143, price not stated.

Gitanjali: Offering of Song and Art by Rabindranath Tagore is presented here with 103 paintings—Kangra-style—by Mark W. McGinnis which serve to illustrate the verses and the images inspired by them.
Mapin, Ahmedabad, 2005, pp. 103, price not stated.

My Fellow Traveller: A Translation of Humsafar by Hameeda Akhtar Husain Raipuri, translated from the Urdu by Amina Azfai is the memoirs which complement the memoirs of the noted Urdu critic and short story writer, Akhtar Husain Rajpuri.
Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2006, pp. 384, Rs. 495.00

Faith and Spiritual Conversion

Amlan Dasgupta

THE LAMP OF LOVE: JOURNEYING WITH THE SABRI BROTHERS
By Amanullah Armstrong Chishti
Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2005, pp.147, Rs. 295.00

The Lamp of Love is an account of the writer's experiences of travel, first to Pakistan, and then with the famous Pakistani qawwali singers, the Sabri brothers, to various Sufi shrines in India and Pakistan. The work is however neither a travelogue in the conventional sense nor a book about music: it is best described as a personal account of faith and spiritual conversion. The account is unusual, to say the least: the writer was an Australian national, and she describes how she experienced a vision of the late Haji Ghulam Farid Sabri, which drew her to the Sabri family with whom she finds a new home. The cultural and familial transposition is interlarded with the story of a gradual absorption in the spiritual realm of the Chishti silsila or tradition. Visions, dreams and miracles figure largely in the account. The book we have is the fulfilment of a mandate received in a vision; however, the author's engagement with Islam appears to be of longer standing. That too, we are informed enigmatically, came out of a dream.

It is difficult to assess a book so uncompromisingly based upon belief in terms of autobiography or travel narrative. The journey, as Amatullah Armstrong Chishti makes it clear to us, is to be mapped in spiritual terms. As one might expect in a narrative of this kind, it is punctuated by moments of crisis or epiphanic vision. The point of the book appears to be its description of the writer's discovery and engagement with the Sufi tradition. The book gives an account of Sufi devotional practices, especially about the part played by music. Sufi saints and their legendary histories feature largely in the account. The book however makes no claim to objectivity: the writer's interest is entirely in the Sabri clan and their music. One should not therefore expect a coherent account of the qawwali tradition and its phenomenal spread throughout the world in recent times. What we have instead close personal vignettes of the Sabri brothers, especially of Mehmood Ghaznavi Sabri; though the book does not make this explicit, the journey that begins with the vision of Haji Ghulam Farid ends in the marriage of the author with Mehmood Sabri.

The style of the book is elliptic and sometimes extravagant. The past and the present merge, making it difficult to reconstruct a chronology of events, but that is hardly what the book seeks to give. A kind of stylistic excess is not uncommon in works dealing with or emanating out of "mystical" traditions, and this work is not free from it. At the same time, one senses that there are silences and elisions in the account of the writer's cultural re-orientation. The occasional references to practices or events that the writer finds difficult to adjust to suggest that the acculturation could not have been an easy one; one misses more information on this account. It is quite natural, one feels, that the writer should have taken up the contentious issue of the permissibility of music in Islamic culture, and presents a strong, though necessarily one-sided view of the matter. The writer also expresses her resentment at the brusque manner in which she as a woman is denied entry to holy shrines. Less comprehensible is the debate over the relative positions of qawwals and 'khadims' (hereditary attendants) at the shrine of Mui'nuddin Chishti at Ajmer Sharif. The work continually uses dreams, visions and inner promptings as the means of validating personal experience. The markers of material existence, such as videocassettes, compact discs and mobile phones, mingle easily with the tropes of the marvellous.

The Lamp of Love leaves one somewhat bemused, for it raises questions that is does not answer. However, the subject is likely to be of interest to the ever-increasing number of devotees of Sufi music in the subcontinent and elsewhere, though as we have seen, the work focuses exclusively on the contribution of the Sabri family. One of the attractive features of the work is that scattered through it are verses from Sufi masters, many from the incomparable Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi.■

Amlan Dasgupta teaches in the Department of English, Jadavpur University, Kolkata.

Pioneering Book

Partho Datta

SUFI MUSIC OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN: SOUND, CONTEXT AND MEANING IN QAWWALI
By Regula Burckhardt Qureshi
Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2005, pp.265, Rs.595.00

This book has been in print for almost thirty years and it is a tribute to Regula Burckhardt Qureshi and her pathbreaking account of qawwali that she has had such a loyal readership in India and Pakistan, the home of this pre-eminent form of sufi music. Qawwali together with ghazal and khyal was one of the genres of music to be recorded on 78rpm discs from the early decades of the twentieth century. From the 1950s qawwali was also widely used in Hindi films giving it an audience and reach of the commercially popular song. In fact the setting of Hindi film qawwali is usually romantic, a pretext for the hero and heroine to sing coyly to each other which obscures the fact that traditional qawwali is sung mainly in a dargah and is a deeply religious experience. The latest (and notorious) example of transformed qawwali in Hindi film is the hit song "Kajara Rey" from "Bunty and Babli". However there also existed patrons who often organized qawwali performances during Holi to mark the advent of spring, but such occasions have more or less gone out of fashion.

Burckhardt's book with its formidable scholarship and academic rigour is an ethnography of qawwali as performance in sufi shrines in north India especially Delhi. There are very detailed descriptions and analyses of the qawwali experience (in which only men are allowed to participate), the repertoire of singers, the nature of the music and most importantly its place in sufi practice. The author reminds us that for centuries Sufi communities have sustained this musical tradition in the *mahfil-i-sama* (the assembly of listening) and it was through this act of listening that the sufi sought to activate his link with his spiritual guide, departed saints and ultimately god. Qureshi's larger goal is systematic ethnomusicological enquiry which she defines as "establishing the meaning or significance of musical sound in terms of its social use and cultural function". She asks: "How does qawwali, the music, articulate with qawwali, its context of performance? Or, in other words, how does qawwali musical sound become meaningful outside itself?" (p.5). She writes that qawwali embodies the ideology of Sufism and this in turn acts as a driving force for the performance. Interestingly she also demonstrates how this music affirms traditional social structures which at the same time promotes individual self-assertion. Qawwali she suggests provides a crucial entry into north Indian Muslim society, a vital communicative link that builds communities between performers and listeners and also between listeners.

Qawwali singers see themselves as professional musicians who defer to the higher status and rank accorded to Hindustani classical musicians especially vocalists, despite the fact that qawwali performers have special non-musical competence that sets them apart. One story of khyal does trace its beginning to the lineage of "qawwal bacches" (the families of qawwal offspring). The most illustrious vocalist from the qawwal bacche lineage was Tanras Khan (d.1884), employed in the court of the last Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar of Delhi. Tanras Khan is celebrated as a maverick maestro of khyal and his life demonstrated that despite the hierarchy between classical and qawwali genres there was a constant circulation of musical knowledges. The great Alladiya Khan was forbidden to learn from qawwal bacches by his family (they were dhrupad singers originally from Atrauli) but he was so influenced by qawwal bacche Mubarak Ali of Jaipur that he named his new khyal style the Jaipur-Atrauli gayaki to pay tribute to his mentor. Qawwali singers often drew on the superior compositional skills of classical vocalists. The Atrauli maestro Mehboob Khan "Daras Piya" often composed exclusively for qawwali singers. In the last few decades the qawwali singer who most personified the link with classical music was the late Jafar Husain Khan Badauni who had extensive training from Mushtaq Hussain Khan of Rampur-Sahaswan. But no qawwali repertoire is complete without the legendary Amir Khusrau's compositions in praise of Sheikh Nizamuddin Auliya, a vital musical link going back hundreds of years.

This is a pioneering book that deserves wide circulation.■

Partho Datta is Fellow, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.

Of Arms And The Man

Lt. Gen. J.F.R. Jacob

ARMS AND ARMOUR: TRADITIONAL WEAPONS OF INDIA
By E. Jaiwant Paul
Roli Books, New Delhi, 2005, pp.144, price not stated.

Arma Virumcum Cano (Of Arms I Sing and the Man)—Virgil

Weapons have always intrigued mankind, because mankind has always been intrigued by war. The author further refers to an old quotation—"War is a joyous thing... can anyone who has tasted that pleasure, fear death". These thoughts belong to the heroic Homerian era, long long past. War is no longer a joyous thing.

A.E. Housman wrote:

Now no more of winters biting.
Filth in trench from fall to spring
Summers full of sweat and fighting
For the Kesar or the King.

And Wilfred Owen:

What passing bells for these who died as cattle?
Only the monstrous anger of the guns...
The shrill demented Choir of wailing Shells...
Shall shine the holy glimmers of goodbyes.

The book is a well produced, well printed and superbly illustrated treatise on weapons and armour of a by-gone era of early and medieval warfare. The author cites examples from the *Rig veda*, the *Mahabharata* and Kautilya. There are illustrations of early Buddhist iconography from Bharut and Sanchi. He traces the development of weapons during the Kushan, Gupta and Pala periods.

The author deals at length with the weaponry of the warrior Rajputs and cites examples from Todd's *Annals of Rajasthan.*

He is fascinated by Rajput chivalry, dwelling in some detail on the Battle of Tarain fought in 1191 between Prithviraj Chauhan and Muhammad Ghori. The battle was joined as the Rajputs sounded the attack by blowing conch shells from the backs of elephants. The Afghanis mounted on horses and camels broke and fled before the Rajputs. Ghori and Prithviraj met in single combat, Ghori, severely wounded, fled. The rout of Ghori's Army was complete. Ghori returned with a larger army. Jaichand Raja of Kanauj allied himself with Ghori. Prithviraj engaged Ghori at Tarain. This time victory went to Ghori. The author maintains that Prithviraj was not killed at Tarain but was captured, taken to Afghanistan and blinded. Legend has it that Prithviraj, though blinded, was able to fire an arrow through Ghori's chest. The author mentions that when passing through Ghazni with its mud fort he espied two tombs one purported to be of Sultan Ghori and the other of Prithviraj Chauhan. He watched as Afghans stamped on the grave of Prithviraj. The author wants the remains buried there to be brought back to India, where they belong.

The author goes into details regarding the differences of the medieval swords of North India and those of the South. Swords forged during the Mughal period were influenced by Persian armourers. Persian swordsmiths were often employed at the principal Indian Courts. Indian swordsmiths soon mastered Persian techniques. the Persian sword was curved backward. The talwar, used by the Mughals and Rajputs had a curved blade with a standard Indian hilt (Indo Muslim). The Shamsheer, which is Persian in origin, has a narrower, blade and a pistol type hilt.

The author touches on Babar's victory over Ibrahim Lodi at Panipat in 1526. He describes Akbar's armoury comprising some sixty-nine types of weapons, most of them profusely decorated. Akbar practised swordmanship almost daily. The author feels that the famous Damascus blades were manufactured in India and finished in Damascus.

He deovtes a short chapter to the Chittor battles, and the tragic fate that befell Padmini. He goes on to describe the development of the Mughal swords particularly the functional and beautiful weapons crafted during the reign of Jehangir. The Mughals established workshops (Karkhanas) for the manufacture of swords. However, the tradition of swordmaking was widespread though the country and certain villages and small towns were proud of their iron smiths, (lohars) who sold their weapons in local and regional markets. The Rajput 'Khanda' remained an important weapon during Mughal times. The hilt in the course of time gave way to the Hindu basket hilt derived from European Swords.

The Maratha empire spread to the borders of Afghanistan. Some of the Maratha swords (dhup) used foreign blades (firangi) but were not up to standard and were soon superceded. The Pata with a gauntlet hilt is unique. The author gives details of this type of sword. There is a short chapter on Maratha warfare and the genius of Shivaji's tactics, highlighting the mobility of the cavalry and the enveloping tactics designed to harass and cut off supplies. These tactics succeeded. They became less effective with the passage of time with the introduction of firearms and cannon.

There is a chapter on types of dagger and the katar. This is followed by a short chapter on the various types of blade and hilts. These are beautifully illustrated as also the chapter on maces, spears, battleaxes and other weapons including the zaghol (pointed axe for piercing the helmets or mail), as also the tiger claw (baghnak) made famous by Shivaji in his encounter with the treacherous Afzal Khan. Another weapon described is the chakra (war quoit). This famous Sikh weapon is in the form of a flat steel ring sharpened on the outside edge. Sikh warriors are said to have carried as many as six at a time on top of their turbans or around the arm. These were effective upto eighty paces.

There is a well illustrated chapter on body armour dedicated to the various categories, leather and fabric, scale armour of overlapping plates, Brigandine where overlapping plates are attached inside the garment, Lamellar armour which consists of small overlapping plates held together by laces, mail armour of interlocking steel rings, plate armour and lastly mail and plate armour combined. There is a chapter on shields followed by a description of the various types of horse armour. Like horses, elephants were an essential part of an Indian Army and were used both for fighting and load carrying. Incidentally, though not mentioned by the author, elephants were used by Younghusband across the Jelap La into Tibet in 1904. The British XIV Army used working elephants in the Burma campaign in World War II.

There is an interesting chapter on the decoration of weapons with descriptions of Damascening, the art of inlaying gold on steel. These techniques entered India from Damascus via Iran. Also described are the techniques for enamelling, jewelling, niello work, gilding, chiselling and etching. The book concludes with a description of the lost wax process used for casting hilts. The lost wax method was widely used, not only in the manner described by the author, but also in the casting of figures for several thousand years, the oldest known specimen being found at Mohenjodaro.

The book is well produced and illustrated and is an authoritative and comprehensive treatise on the subject of arms and armour. It should find a place in all libraries and officers' messes. It will be of interest also to the general reader and should find a pride of place on the coffee table.■

Lt. General J.F.R. Jacob commanded an artillery battery in World War II serving in the Middle East, Burma and Sumatra. He played a pivotal role in the War of 1971. He directly negotiated with Lt. General Niazi to convert a ceasefire into a surrender. He also served as Governor of Goa and Punjab.

Imprints of Stone

Jose Pereira

QUTB MINAR AND ITS MONUMENTS: MONUMENTAL LEGACY
By B. M. Pande
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 95, price not mentioned.

In the 21st century Muslims no longer rule lands peopled by a majority of non-Muslims, but that was not the case before the 18th century. Wherever Muslims reigned, it was not unusual for them to assert the presence of their religion, Islam, by spectacular monuments, such as domes and towers, particularly the latter. Two such lands are Spain and north India, each having a monumental tower, both contemporaries — the Giralda at Seville in Spain (1184-1198) and the Qutb Minar in north India (1199 –c. 1369). The former may be aptly characterized as the queen of Muslim towers, and the latter the king.

Pande's book is the definitive treatise on that regal structure, and promises to remain so for the foreseeable future; it supplants the book of J. A. Page on the Qutb Minar, published in 1938, as the authoritative treatise on the subject. Page's own researches developed from those of the indefatigable Alexander Cunningham, undertaken in the 1860s and 1870s. The Qutb's aesthetic qualities were noted by the first historian of Indian architecture, James Fergusson.

Pande's book is logically structured, starting with the pivotal monument of the Mehrauli region, the ruined Might of Islam mosque and its minaret the Qutb tower, and then moving outwards to cover the entire region. After a brief Introduction that presents a conspectus of the monuments to be discussed, and a chapter that outlines the monuments' 'Archaeological and Historical Background' (Chapter 1), the author proceeds to a description of the 'Monuments – the Qutb complex' (Chapter 2). The Muslims introduced the arch to a country accustomed to erect only trabeate or corbelled structures. The architects of the mosque preserved the arcuate appearance of its façade but constructed the arches in the manner of corbels. The mosque was begun in 1192 and completed in 1198. 1192 was a fateful year, when the last Hindu king of the central region of the Indo-Gangetic plain, Prith-viraja II, was defeated by Muhammad Ghori at Tarain. In that same year Ghori's slave, Qutbuddin Aibak captured Delhi; the infidels were overcome by the "might of Islam" and had to be reminded of the fact – by a lofty tower. While his master was still alive, in 1199, Aibak laid the foundations of the "tower of victory," a minaret from which the call to prayer could be proclaimed. The architects of the minaret were aware of its triumphal func-tion: an inscription of the time of Alauddin (r. 1296-1316) identifies it as just that: *Srisulatran Alavadi vijayastambha*: "Sultan Alauddin's pillar of victory."

Twenty-seven temples, Hindu and Jain, were demolished to furnish the mosque's materials; some of their iconic carvings still survive. The tower itself was to have four storeys; Aibak erected just one: it was left to his son-in-law, Iltutmish, to complete the rest. Pande focuses on that tower, the Qutb Complex's pre-eminent structure, in about six pages of text, and then examines the other edifices of the Complex, the Ala'i Darwaza and the tomb of Iltutmish. Indian architects eventually mastered arcuate construction and displayed their knowledge of it in the sandstone and marble Ala'i Darwaza, perhaps the most elegant of all the structures described in the book. As for the tomb of Iltutmish, it is a square building profusely decorated with Hindu motifs and Quranic inscriptions, "one of the richest examples of Hindu art applied to Muhammadan purposes" in James Fergusson's words.

From our center, the Qutb, we move outwards, to examine the "Monuments to the South and South-East of the Qutb Complex" (Chapter 3). Here the only significant structure, to my mind is Jamali Kamali's mosque, an elegant structure in sandstone and marble, with five mihrabs and a high dome. Lastly, are the 'Monuments in and around Mehrauli' (Chapter 4). They include the tomb of Adam Khan, a general in Akbar's army who murdered the emperor's foster father and foster mother; at Akbar's orders he was flung to his death from the ramparts of Agra fort. The book ends with 'Practical Tips and Information', a useful Glossary and Further Reading.

There is a frequent reference to Quranic inscriptions, but little information about their content. The knowledge of that content would help us clarify the meaning and purpose of the building where they occur. Be that as it may, we have here a solid work, but somewhat heavy reading. Still the bewilderment of some readers may be the delight of the specialist.■

José Pereira is a writer and critic.

Communication

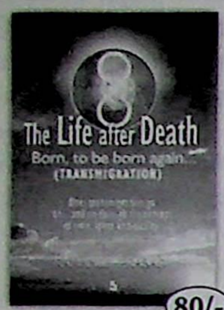
A Response to review of *Universalizing Elementary Education in India: Uncaging the Tiger Economy* (TBR, October 2005)

We are grateful to Deepa Sankar for a generous review. There are a few issues on which as authors we would like to respond. 1. She says that "the survey could have drawn more representative samples to derive state level estimations of private sector as the existing sample size of private aided and unaided schools in many states under study are quite small to derive any meaningful conclusions". Actually, chapter 1 of the book quite categorically states that the sample of the survey is indeed a representative one at the level of each of the eight states examined. These states actually account for three-fourths of India's children out of school. 2. Our criticism of government policies that the growth rate of public expenditure on elementary education fell after 1991. She says: "Here, it is to be noted that a "growing" growth rates (sic) is desired only upto an optimum level, after which it should just keep the levels rather than growing further to avoid diminishing returns to scale". The fact is that despite progress in the 1990s, not only had primary education not been universalised in the states examined (UP, Bihar, MP, Rajasthan, Assam, West Bengal, AP), but upper primary enrolments were still 51-70 per cent in rural areas and between 67 and 99 per cent in urban areas, i.e. hundreds of thousands of children were still out of school in every state. There was no risk whatsoever of running into diminishing returns to scale here. 3. Why we are critical of the share of teacher salaries in total public recurrent expenditures. We are not critical of the absolute level of the salaries of individual teachers; what we point out, however, is that the teacher salary share in recurrent costs in public recurrent education expenditure at elementary level is unacceptably high at 94-97%, and is higher than even in a typical sub-Saharan African country. This high share is accounted for by the relatively low level of public elementary expenditure – which remains low despite the rise in the 1990s. 4. The reviewer faults us for lacking in prudence by recommending that the government "reallocate (funds) from the secondary education sector" to elementary education. We have only argued that in an environment of resource scarcity, and with governments' – both central and state – committed to lowering fiscal deficits, increases in public education expenditure by states should go mainly to elementary education, rather than to secondary or tertiary education. That is the equitable way forward. We do argue that historically, secondary education expenditure in India has exceeded that of other developing countries at with comparable levels of enrolment – partly because of a tendency of state governments to convert private unaided secondary schools to government-aided ones.

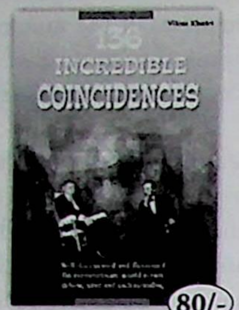
Fifth, the reviewer points out that we make a case "for new taxes for elementary education, which has already in place (sic) under the 2 per cent cess levied by the Central government on various taxes purely for elementary education" – a measure introduced in the February 2004 budget. Actually, the book points out that the study's conclusions were submitted as a report to the government of India in December 2001, wherein the suggestion for such a tax was made, i.e. long before the government actually made that cess into law.

Santosh Mehrotra, New Delhi.

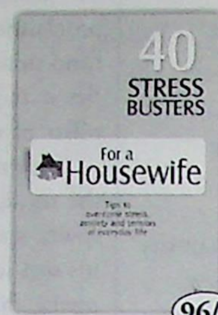
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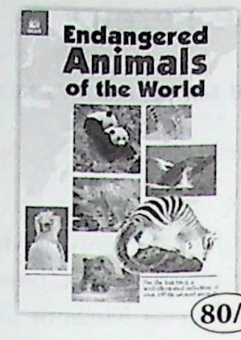
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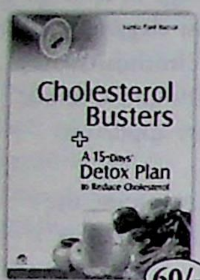
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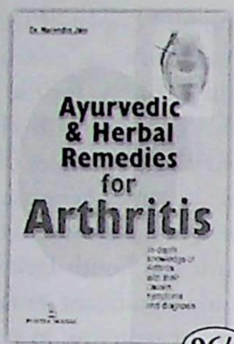
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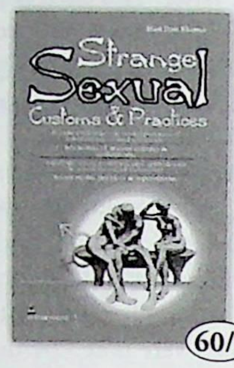
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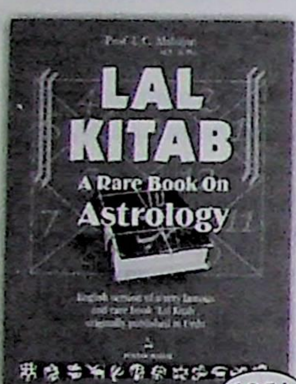
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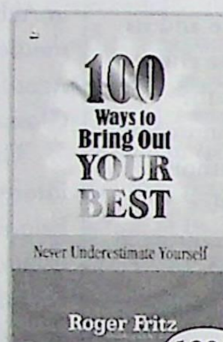
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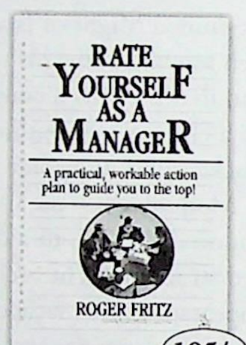
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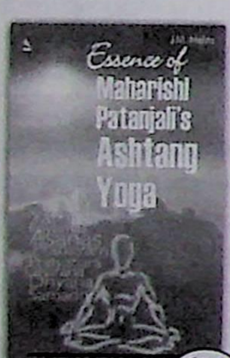
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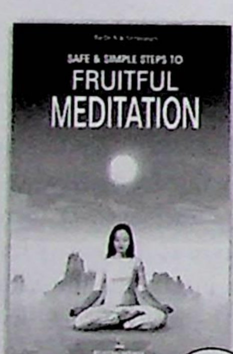
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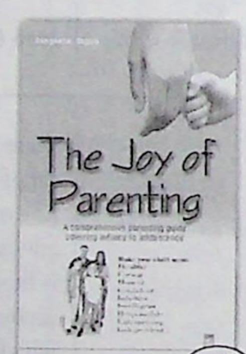
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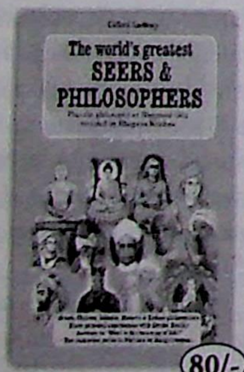
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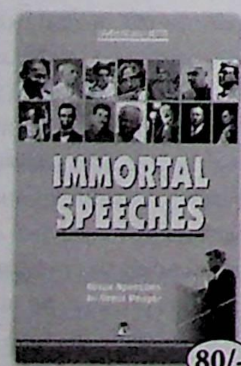
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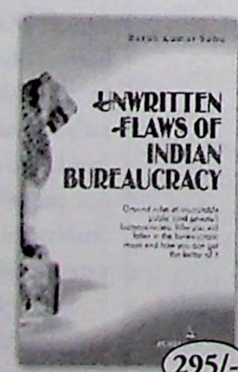
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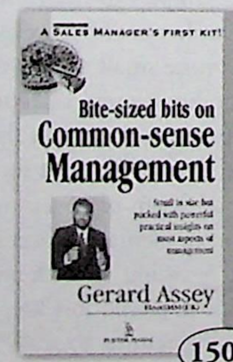
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Islamic Thought

Moosa Raza

ALFARABI: THE POLITICAL WRITINGS—SELECTED APHORISMS AND OTHER TEXTS
Translated and annotated by Charles E. Butterworth
Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2005, pp. 179, Rs. 495.00

GHAZALI & THE POETICS OF IMAGINATION
By Ebrahim Moosa
Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2005, pp. 349, Rs. 595.00

THE OXFORD DICTIONARY OF ISLAM
By John L. Esposito
Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2005, pp. 359, Rs. 395.00

Rumi, the great thirteenth century mystic wrote in his *mathnavi*:
Beshtar ashab-e jannat ablah and
Ta ze sharr-e failsufi mirahand

(Most of the dwellers of Paradise are simple folk –for they remained aloof from the mischief of philosophy).

By the time of Rumi, the mystics of Islam had already concluded that only one path to God was the path of simple faith, direct experience and ecstatic union with God.

There has been an eternal conflict between the philosopher and mystic in the world of Islam since the very beginning of the intellectual movement. The Oxford University Press has chosen to bring out two books on two of the greatest representatives of Islamic thought under its series entitled Studies in Islamic Philosophy. Alfarabi, the philosopher was born in 870AD and lived to the ripe old age of eighty. Alfarabi was of Turkish origin and spent most of his working life in the court of Sayf al Dawla, the Shia ruler of Hamdan. But he was a true student of Greek philosophy, having studied Plato, Aristotle, Porphyry and the neo-platonists and incorporated the thinking of these philosophers into the realm of Islam and its religious beliefs. Farabi believed, with some truth as modern scholarship has shown, that philosophy had come to an end everywhere in the world and had found a new home and a new life in the world of Islam. He also believed that human reason is superior to religious faith and the perfect philosopher was superior to the prophet. This was a very bold stand to take in the tenth century (fourth century Islam). It would have shaken the beliefs of his contemporaries – especially the *ulema* of Islam. He mitigates the likely impact of this claim by asserting that the Prophet was a perfect philosopher and it was because of the perfection of his reason that revelation was vouchsafed him. It follows therefore that a virtuous religion is nothing but truth that "a human being ascertains either by himself by means of primary knowledge or by demonstration" (*Book of Religion* – Aphorism 4).

Any religion that is not in consonance with human reason is therefore, implies Farabi, an errant religion. Farabi also postulates in the same book that virtuous religion is similar to philosophy but goes on to argue that all virtuous laws are subordinate to the universals of practical philosophy.

The role of the Prophet, as a law giver, is also therefore subject to his role as a philosopher, a practical philosopher. And therefore it may happen that due to various exigencies he may not be able to "give an exhaustive account of them". Such exigencies, says Farabi, may prevent him from giving a complete set of laws. "Death may overtake him and carry him away before he has covered all of them; necessary occupations such as wars and other things may keep him from it; or it may be that he only determines actions for each incident and each occurrence he observes or is asked about, at which time he determines, legislates, and establishes a tradition regarding what ought to be done for that kind of incidence. Since not everything that can occur does occur in his time or in his country many things remain that could occur in another time or in another country, each needing a specifically determined action (*Book of Religion*—Aphorism 7).

The implications of what Alfarabi wrote for the establishment of Islamic Law – the *shariah* – did not escape the *ulema* of his time and subsequent orthodox scholars. Much of the opposition to the ideas of Farabi and the total black-out of his writings from the madrasas of the Muslim world can be attributed to his view that religious laws too are subject to the reasoning of human mind.

In fact, Farabi not content with the claim of the superiority of philosophy goes on to claim that all laws are subject to change. "If after the death of the lawgiver, someone succeeds who is like him in all respects, then the successor will be the one who determines what the first did not determine". That is the righteous rational successor will fill up the gaps in the set of laws determined and left behind by the first original Legislator. "Not only this, but it is upto him to alter much of what the first had legislated and to determine it in another way, *when he knows that this is best for his time* – not because the first erred but because the first made a determination according to what was best for his time and this one makes a determination according to what is best subsequent to the time of the first, this being the kind of thing the first would alter also, were he to observe it". This rule applies to all successive rulers so long as they belong to the category of rational, practical philosophers and have a similar righteous attitude to the first law giver. What happens when a new successor emerges who does not have the same attributes as his predecessors? Farabi is, in actual fact, unable to answer this question fully, beyond stipulating that he "should not do anything differently nor make any alteration, but should let everything remain the way it was". Easier said than done!

In the selected aphorism, Alfarabi's contributions to ethics, practical morals, governance of communities, cities and states, and other diverse topics are covered. Such nuggets as "Even if one who is self-restrained does virtuous actions, he does good things while having a passion and a longing for evil…. He does good things and is irritated at doing them." But the really virtuous "follows what his trait and his yearning inspire him to do", are juxtaposed with other observations such as "Quick-wittedness is excellence in surmising something quickly in no time, or in time not delayed". Such aphorisms are strewn around in the book.

However, one of the best known contributions of Farabi is his concept of the virtuous city – *al madinat al fadhila*. Obviously, Alfarabi was influenced in his conception of the perfect city by Plato's *Republic*. He describes four sorts of rulers and governors of a perfect state. The first is one in whom six stipulations come together: wisdom, complete prudence, excellent persuasion, excellent imaginative evocation, bodily capability for struggle and absence of any physical and mental disability. Farabi concedes that it is rare to have all the above virtues coming together in a single human being. But it is possible for these attributes to be "dispersed" among a group of people. Such a group then should replace a single ruler who may not possess all the virtues. Where one does not find the two kinds of rulers, the third best is to find a ruler who is "knowledgeable of the preceding divine and traditional laws the first leaders brought forth to govern the state. Yet, such a ruler should be endowed with the capability to "infer what was not explicitly declared in the previous traditional laws". In short, he should be a *mujtahid*, in the traditional language of Islamic law – though Farabi refrains from using that expression.

In the subsequent sections in Selected Aphorisms, Farabi talks about the framing of laws and the principles that should govern it, the ordering of society in a perfect state, the assigning of time slots for the performance of various acts needed to sustain a perfect state, the need to create Welfare Funds to support such citizens of the state who are not perceived

to be contributing directly to the governance of the state, such as "transmitters of the creed, the scribes, the physicians, and their like, the chronically ill". He concludes this section by saying that "they should set up two reserves of monies in the city; a reserve for those whose crafts do not have as primary intended goals the earning of monies and a reserve for the chronically ill and those who are in the same situation".

War is the next subject of Farabi's attention. He divides war into four categories, but anathemizes all wars undertaken against "a people only to humiliate them, make them submissive, and have them honour the (aggressor) for nothing other than extending his command among them and having them obey him.... And to rule them and govern their affairs as he sees fit.... And have them comply with what..... he has a passion for".

After describing the political philosophy that governs a virtuous state, Farabi delineates what material and spiritual gains are attained by the ruler and the ruled in a perfect state.

Alfarabi in his various aphorisms attempts to explain how philosophy could provide valid and rational explanations of all the important issues faced by the contemporary world of Islam. Prophecy and revelation as the outcome of the supreme perfection of the human mind, the manifestation of the divine providence in the hierarchic order of the universe the stipulation that the perfect man, the philosopher, ought also to be the sovereign ruler all were to have profound implications for the subsequent development of Islamic thought. He made an impact on the writings of the 10th century rationalists, the Brethren of Purity (*Ikhwan al-Safa*), al-Masudi, Miskawayh and al-Amiri. The great names of Islamic philosophy viz. Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd followed him in his essential reasoning. Maimonides, the greatest of the Jewish philosophers hailed as a second Moses, held Alfarabi in high esteem and his observations on the perfect state, the framing of laws and governance are having a profound influence on the modern thinkers of Islam.

Oxford University's *Alfarabi – The Political Writings* is a well brought out translation of the selected writings of the great philosopher. In his attempt to remain true to the original Arabic, Charles Butterworth's translation tends to become a bit obscure at places and the language tends to get stilted. There have been many German, French and Spanish translations of Alfarabi's individual works. Butterworth's is the first book containing the selected works of Alfarabi in a single volume. As such it deserves to be read by all those who are interested in medieval Muslim philosophy and its implications for the ordering of society and governance in the modern world.

The second book under review – *Ghazali – The Poetics of Imagination* deals with an altogether different kind of personality to Alfarabi. While Alfarabi represents the highest levels of philosophy reached by Muslim philosophers, Ghazali represents the highest level of mystic thought achieved by any Muslim mystic. Few would contend with the observation of Ebrahim Moosa, the author, in the Introduction that "Ghazali is by far one of the most influential thinkers in the world." In contrast to Alfrabi's belief that human reason ought to form the basis of all virtuous religion, Ghazali came to the final conclusion that human reasoning can take man thus far and no further. Ghazali after starting off as a philosopher and teaching philosophy and science at the University of Nizamiyya in Baghdad, ended up by writing his famous thesis *Tihafat al Falasafa* – the Incoherence of Philosophers. In this, he showed his disillusionment with philosophy and its limitations. Though Ibn Rushd wrote a refutation of Ghazali in his *Tihafat al Tihafa* – the Incoherence of Incoherence, the refutation did not gain as much attention in the Islamic world as the original.

Ghazali was born in 1058, almost two hundred years after Alfarabi, but the students of Alfarabi's thoughts were still dominating the Muslim intellectual scene, especially in Baghdad which was the intellectual capital of the world for almost four centuries. In the Nizamiyya College, Ghazali lectured to an audience of over three hundred students for four years. At the same time, he was also studying philosophy through private reading and wrote several books on that subject. In 1095, at the age of 37, Ghazali underwent a profound spiritual experience. Ghazali wrote his spiritual autobiography a couple of years before his death entitled *al Mungidh min al-dalal* and translated as "Deliverance from Error", or "Awakening from Darkness" by most translators and as "Rescuer from Misguidance" by Ebrahim Moosa. Ghazali wrote in that book about the onset of his spiritual crisis thus: "The thirst for grasping the real meaning of things was indeed my habit and wont from my early years and in the prime of my life. It was an instinctive natural disposition placed in my make up by God, Most High, not something due to my own choosing and contriving. As a result.... inherited beliefs lost their hold on me when I was still quite young. For I saw that the children of Christians always grew up embracing Christianity, and the children of Muslims always grew up following the religion of Islam..... I felt the inner urge to seek the true meaning..... of the beliefs arising through slavish imitation of parents and teachers". Under the influence of the philosophers, Ghazali attempted to seek the certitude of God's existence on a basis similar to the mathematical axiom that two plus two equals four. He searched for it in religious sciences, in physical sciences, in mathematics and in philosophy. He found it nowhere. This crisis of conscience led him to question his own occupation as an academician and as a teacher. The debilitating illness that he suffered from as a result of this mental conflict afflicted his speech and he fell silent. Finally, he abandoned his teaching job, placed his family in the protection of a religious trust, abandoned Baghdad and took to the life of a wandering sufi.

For eleven years, he wandered in Syria, staying for various periods in Damascus, Hebron, Tus, Medina, Mecca, Alexandria and many monasteries in the desert. During this period, he lived as a poor sufi, often in solitary meditation and other spiritual exercises. During this period of intense mystical activity, he composed his magnum opus, *Ihya ulum al-din* (Revival of the Religious Sciences).

By the end of the eleven years, Ghazali had come to the conclusion that one can reach God only through personal experience, through the *sufi way*, the way of 'dhauq'. As he writes, "The aim of their knowledge is to lop off the obstacles present in the soul, and to rid oneself of its reprehensible habits and vicious qualities in order to attain, thereby a heart empty of all save God and adorned with the constant remembrance of God." The Revival of Religious Sciences is perhaps one of the most comprehensive theses examining the foundations of faith and its place in the centrality of human nature. In the process of this examination, Ghazali analysed every human emotion – thought, belief, action, character. He also wrote in depth on human emotions such as anger, jealousy, greed etc. and examined their roots. He laid down the basic rules of living within the faith of Islam.

Before the advent of Ghazali, *shariah* and *tasawwuf*, Islamic law and mysticism were in a state of deep conflict. In search of God, the sufis had felt the law to be an obstacle. They thought that the shackles placed on the freedom of human emotions by the law prevented an ardent seeker from experiencing any spiritual state where man became a part of the divine. Hence, once a seeker has achieved God, there was no need for the discipline of law, no need for ritual ablutions, ritual prayer, fasting and observance of the Islamic code. Many sufi sects such as the *malamatiya*, went about naked taking intoxicants such as opium and hashish and behaving like the hippies of yore. The *ulema* on the other hand condemned all sufis as heretics and *kafirs* who were destroying the very foundations of Islam through their deviant behaviour and heretical beliefs.

Ghazali's greatest achievement was to reconcile *shariah* with *tasawwuf*, by imbuing each ritual act with a spiritual significance and placing each mystic act within the frame work of *shariah*. This reconciliation of sufism with the law led finally to the recognition of sufism by the *ulema* as a part of mainstream Islam and the acceptance of the *sharia* as the first step towards the experience of God, by the sufis. This reconciliation has lasted till day.

Ghazali did not establish any sufi order. But the influence of his thought and his writings can be felt in every sufi order that prevails in the modern Islamic world. Ebrahim Moosa's book is one more addition to the corpus of literature that gets published every year on Ghazali and his thought in every major language of the world.

Ghazali's contributions in such diverse fields as mysticism, exegesis, ethics and Islamic jurisprudence have led the subsequent generations to confer on him the title 'Hujjat al Islam' – the Proof of Islam, as well as the honorific of Imam. Pious Muslim always think of him as Imam Ghazali, May Allah have Mercy on him.

Ebrahim Moosa sets out to examine the aesthetics of imagining religion, as propounded in the various writings of Ghazali – especially the relationship between knowledge and subjectivity. Contrary to the belief in some quarters that Ghazali was a middle of the road thinker, conformist, Ebrahim Moosa sets out to prove that Ghazali straddled the liminal space between the inside and the outside, a space beyond his own location and thinking. "Ghazali actually straddled, agonized over, and negotiated antinomies, practical ethics and spiritual imperatives, religious law and morality Sufism and shariat and so on. In nine chapters, Moosa delves into the intricacies of Ghazali's thoughts ranging from the spiritual founts of Ghazali's writings, the deep inner voice of the conscience coming 'perilously close' to violating the apparent norms, how knowledge becomes an instrument that leads to truth, the various heresies of his time and the conflicts they generated which still afflict the modern life of Islam, and the foundations of Islamic law, fiqh, and how its path leads to salvation in afterlife.

The sixth chapter of the book especially deals with Ghazali's migration from philosophy to mysticism. Ghazali, says Moosa, was 'disturbed by the attitude of the philosophers and the impact of philosophical discussions and theology in the public domain". He was especially dismayed by the impact made by the ideas of Alfarabi and ibn Sina. The condescending attitude of some philosophers towards religion, influenced no doubt by Alfarabi's assertion that even the virtuous religion was subordinate to philosophy, dismayed him. Enamoured and infatuated with "high sounding names such as Socrates, Hippocrates, Plato and Aristotle, the philosophers denied revealed laws and religious confessions and rejected the teachings of religion and religious confessions believing them to be man made laws and embellished tricks". Starting with this premise, Ghazali went on to show the limitations of philosophy in attempting to explain the profound truths of religion.

Ghazali returned briefly to his original profession – teaching – not in Baghdad but in Nayshapur. However, having attained the mystic state of union with the infinite, professional academics did not hold much attraction for him. He spent the last years of his life in his native town of Tus, modern day Meshhed in Iran, in a *khanqah* a hermitage established by him to teach his followers the theory and practice of the sufi way of life.

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Book News — Book News

Islam Quintet-I: *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree;* II. *The Book of Saladin;* III. *The Stone Woman;* IV: *A Sultan in Palermo* by Tariq Ali is a set of novels gripping in their narration. Volume I narrates the story of the fall of Granada through a family saga in Muslim Spain. Volume II is a chronicle set in twelfth-century Cairo, Damascus and Jerusalem and a fictional memoir of the Kurdish liberator of Jerusalem. Volume III set in 1899 narrates the story of the family of Iskender Pasha, a retired Ottoman noble. Volume IV charts the life and loves of the medieval cartographer Muhammad al-Idrisi in Palermo in 1153. The *Quintet* is a work in progress.
Seagull Books, 2005, (first published in 1991, 1998, 2000 and 2005—by Chatto & Windus-Vol I & by Verso-Vols II, III & IV),pp. 242, 367, 274 & 246, Rs. 295.00, Rs. 325.00, Rs. 295.00 & Rs. 295.00

In Search of the Prophet by Shahrukh Hussain and Samira Shackle is an unusual collection of stories about the life of Prophet Muhammad seen through eyes of a young boy.
Puffin, 2006, pp. 151, Rs. 160.00

Kashmir 1947: A Survivor's Story by Krishna Mehta, set during the dark days in Kashmir in October 1947 when the state was under siege, is the portrait of a woman fighting for survival.
Penguin, 2005, pp. 168, Rs. 200.00

to be contributing directly to the governance of the state, such as "transmitters of the creed, the scribes, the physicians, and their like, the chronically ill". He concludes this section by saying that "they should set up two reserves of monies in the city; a reserve for those whose crafts do not have as primary intended goals the earning of monies and a reserve for the chronically ill and those who are in the same situation".

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Moosa Raza is a former civil servant. He established the India Islamic Cultural Centre in Delhi and was its Director General for 10 years. Currently he is a Member of the National Integration Council, Member of Prime Minister's Task Force on J & K and Chairman of The Southern India Education Trust, Chennai.

Book News Book News

Islam Quintet-I: *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree;* II. *The Book of Saladin;* III. *The Stone Woman;* IV: *A Sultan in Palermo* by Tariq Ali is a set of novels gripping in their narration. Volume I narrates the story of the fall of Granada through a family saga in Muslim Spain. Volume II is a chronicle set in twelfth-century Cairo, Damascus and Jerusalem and a fictional memoir of the Kurdish liberator of Jerusalem. Volume III set in 1899 narrates the story of the family of Iskender Pasha, a retired Ottoman noble. Volume IV charts the life and loves of the medieval cartographer Muhammad al-Idrisi in Palermo in 1153. The *Quintet* is a work in progress.
Seagull Books, 2005, (first published in 1991, 1998, 2000 and 2005—by Chatto & Windus-Vol I & by Verso-Vols II, III & IV),pp. 242, 367, 274 & 246, Rs. 295.00, Rs. 325.00, Rs. 295.00 & Rs. 295.00

In Search of the Prophet by Shahrukh Hussain and Samira Shackle is an unusual collection of stories about the life of Prophet Muhammad seen through eyes of a young boy.
Puffin, 2006, pp. 151, Rs. 160.00

Kashmir 1947: A Survivor's Story by Krishna Mehta, set during the dark days in Kashmir in October 1947 when the state was under siege, is the portrait of a woman fighting for survival.
Penguin, 2005, pp. 168, Rs. 200.00

Images of Islam

A.G. Noorani

FOLLOWING MUHAMMAD: RETHINKING ISLAM IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD
By Carl W. Ernst
Foundation Books, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 244, Rs. 450.00

THE TROUBLE WITH ISLAM TODAY: A WAKE-UP CALL FOR HONESTY AND CHANGE
By Irshad Manji
Foundations Books, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 258, Rs. 295.00

ISLAM IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE: RELIGIOUS GROUPS IN INDIA 1900-1947
By Dietrich Reetz
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 379, Rs. 650.00

Dissent within Islam is as old as Islam itself. The first calipah Abu Bakr's oration after the death of Prophet Mohammad and his election as Calipah is well known. "I have been given authority over you but I am not the best of you. If I do well, help me; and if I do ill, then put me right". This was not to last. Crowned heads took over and practised over the centuries brutal repression. Free thought did not die. Dissenters became martyrs.

Carl W. Ernst surveys anti-Islamic attitudes from medieval to the present times and proceeds to discuss Islam itself; the sources of the faith and the ferment in present times.

After 9\11 this Amercian publisher found the manuscript "uncomfortable". It is all to the good that an Indian edition has been published. It will dispel wrong notions among non-Muslims. It should provoke Muslims to study Islam rather than seek comfort in dogmas and cliches of old.

Why did Muslim learning decline? The author records in detail interaction between Muslims and the West in the realm of learning. Recent research indicates, however, that there was a good deal more interchange between Muslims and European Christians in terms of science than has previously been imagined. Although Europeans clearly developed superior technological applications of science with unprecedented success, particularly in fields such as naval and military technology, the efficient bureaucratic use and technology in the service of empire is quite different from basic scientific curiosity.

The book has a brief account of the Prophet's life, the early years of Islam, Mysticism, Islamic art and culture. More relevant are the questions the author raises. They touch also the East's response to the western intellectual challenge. The revivalist is as irrelevant as the fundamentalist, only a little less harmful. There is no such thing in Islam as an Islamic state, it is a political mirage and an intellctual falsehood.

The images of Islam that have dominated the past two centuries were generated in a context of conflict, either/or, and as against West. These were images without dialogue, which like Orientalist painting defined Euro-American culture in contrast to the exotic other. Yet Muslims around the world, like it or not, have been engaged with the main issues of modernity throughout this same period when they have been defined as non-modern, non-western, and non-civilized. Muslims have been debating the same questions that have agitated Europeans and Americans; women's rights, human rights, Marxism, nationalism, revolution, democracy and now globalization. The growing presence of educated Muslim minorities in America and Europe will be the decisive ingredient that will finally make possible a true dialogue that can create new images for a single world in which both Muslims and non-Muslims exist.

Recent years have seen a wealth of learning expended on books that enriched the study of Islam by non-Muslims and Muslims. Tariq Ramadan's *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam* and Abdel Wahab Meddeb's *The Malady of Islam* come to mind. They stirred the intellectual world but not the likes of Oprah Winfrey and Thomas L. Friedman. Irshad Manji's book cannot be mentioned with those books so deficient is it in learning and rigorous analysis. It made a stir because it is shrilly denunciatory besides being self-indulgently narcisistic. It is not addressed to Muslims but to the western reader.

As in any other religion there are gross practices and repressions. The intellectual challenge is to pinpoint the dogmatic falsehoods and expose them—the misinterpretation of the Quran which leads to denial of women's rights is one. Some of the hadith (sayings of the Prophet) which erudite scholar consider "weak" (i.e. unworthy of credence) is another.

But the Manji style and approach are different. "I have to be honest with you. Islam is on very thin ice with me. I am hanging on by my fingernails in anxiety over what is coming next from the self-appointed ambassadors of Allah". Does this matter to anyone but herself? "Yes. I am blunt. You are just going to have to get used to it. In this letter, I am asking questions from which we can no longer hide. Why are we all being held hostage by what is happening between the Palestinians and the Israelis? What is with the stubborn streak of anti-semitism in Islam? Who is the real colonizer of Muslims—America or Arabia? Why are we squandering the talents of women, fully half of God's creation? How can we be so sure that homosexuals deserve ostracism—or death—when the Quran states that everything God made is 'excellent'... Is that a heart attack you are having? Make it fast. Because if we do not speak out against the imperialists within Islam, these guys will walk away with the show".

An hysterical teenager's idiom is inappropriate for scholarly discussion. Personal accounts and a sweeping denunciations abound. Edward Said receives short shift. Bernard Lewis is acclaimed.

Sample this: 'The first question is, "How do you reconcile homosexuality with Islam? " I am openly lesbian. I choose to be 'out' because, having matured in a miserable household under a father who despised joy, I am not about to sabotage the consensual love that offers me joy as an adult... that was religion... This was happiness, I knew which one I needed more. I carried on, intermittently studying Islam, learning the fine art of sustaining relatonships with women (which is another book unto itself), producing television, and generally living the multidirectional life of a twenty-something in North America. As my TV work made me a more viable public figure, my hope of reconciling homosexuality with Islam evolved into a preoccupation. Viewers wanted me to justify my improbable combination of identities.' The TV celebrity decided to become a literary celebrity and succeeded.

Not surprisingly she denounces the Arabs for making "war against Israel" and for not accepting the UN's Partition plan. Israeli scholars like Ilan Pappe and Tom Segev have a different view of the events preceding and immediately following the establishment of Israel.

Irshad Manji won a Fellowship at Yale. Her latest is an article denouncing Iran. It contains this cameo. "It's conceivable that Ahmadinejad is reactivating his country's nuclear enrichment programme precisely to incite a backlash, and thereby hasten the reappearance of the messiah". Why do Iranians who oppose him support the nuclear programme?

The weapons of mass destruction have, in fact, been found. They are people with unshakeable faith in the coming showdown between good and evil. Left in their hands, the world is headed for a clash of Armageddons". Ergo—attack Iran. This more royalist than the King stance is typical of such. We have had them in plenty here—the Sarkari Musalman. Like them, Manji will go far.

It is a shame that the intellectual ferment in the world of Islamic studies in the West, to which non-Muslim and Muslim scholars have contributed, receives less attention than the Manji trash.

Dietrich Reetz of the Free University in Berlin has written a meticulously detailed account of the debates between Muslim groups in colonial India before Independence—the Deobandis, Barelvis, the Nadwa, the Ahl-e-Hadith, Tablighi Jamaat, Ahmadiyas, Ahrahs and Kharsas. Pan-Islamism was not regarded as contradictory to Indian nationalism. Without exception, all political parties sought and received help from clerics in political mobilization.

These groups acted "in the public sphere" and exposed themselves to public scrutiny. When they close in on themselves or are pushed out of the public sphere, they go underground with baleful consequences.■

A.G. Noorani, Lawyer and Columnist with *The Hindustan Times*. His writings include *Indian Political Trails 1775-1947* (OUP), *Constitutional Questions and Citizens Rights* (OUP), *Muslims of India* (OUP) and *Savarkar and Hindustva* (Left World).

Responding To Modern Challenges

Arshad Alam

THE ULAMA IN CONTEMPORARY ISLAM: CUSTODIANS OF CHANGE
By Muhammad Qasim Zaman
Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2004, pp. 291, PKR 595.00

Postcolonial Muslim societies have been mostly understood through the prism of modernization theory. Very often, the focus of these studies has been the 'modernizing imperative' of the postcolonial state. Society as an arena of the non-state was studied only in relation to ways in which it corresponded to the modern demands of postcolonial states. Social groups and institutions which could not fit this theoretical conceptualization were seldom made subjects of scholarly attention. It is for this reason that the Ulama or traditionally educated Muslim religious scholars have so far received far less academic attention as compared to the Islamists, who share most of the assumptions of the modern postcolonial state which they oppose. By pulling the Ulama out of such obscurity, Zaman seeks to fill a very important gap in our understanding of Muslim religious authority.

Zaman makes it clear at the outset that the 'transformations, discourses and religio-political activism of the Ulama' can only be ignored at the cost of misunderstanding crucial facets of Muslim politics. Far from being the passive recipients of the onslaught of modernization, Zaman's work shows the many ways in which the Ulama have not only adapted and responded to modern challenges, but have also used modern institutions to further their own interests. The fact that institutions of the Ulama like the madrasas are increasing in numbers and strength lend credence to Zaman's understanding of the problem. In all the six chapters, Zaman's, central concern has been to bring about this remarkable adaptability of the Ulama through an analysis of their writings and activities.

Zaman argues that the distinction between 'religious' and 'secular' is a gift of colonial modernity having no precedence in early Islamic thought. Early Islam did make a distinction between rational (*maqulat*) and revealed (*manqulat*) knowledge, but the understanding of religion as occupying a distinct 'private' sphere in society has been altogether alien to the Islamic tradition. Zaman goes on to argue, and this is his main argument, that the Ulama accepted this colonial post enlightenment division of spaces as it suited their needs. Moreover, in contemporary times, the Ulama rest and articulate their authority precisely by portraying themselves as the 'custodians' of the private sphere. Any interference in this sphere is resented by the Ulama. Thus, as Zaman rightly argues, the Ulama of both India and Pakistan oppose the interference of the state in their institutions of learning, the madrasas, and see it as a challenge to their legitimate authority. It goes to the credit of Ulama that even the postcolonial states in South Asia accept their claim of being the 'official interpreters of a privatized Islam which enabled them to adjust to new political conditions without a massive or sudden disruption of their authority'.

Having set the grounds, the remainder of the book seeks to understand the strategies through which the Ulama have constructed and maintained their authority. Zaman's formidable mastery of Urdu and Arabic makes it much easier for him to interrogate the genre of 'commentaries' written by various Ulama. The functions of these commentaries, Zaman informs us, are manifold. Firstly it links the writer with an authoritative chain of transmitters of knowledge. Having acquired this symbolic capital, the writer claims an authoritative voice to speak on contemporary religious issues. Moreover, these commentaries also allow the Ulama to build in their responses to modernity, particularly on issues which arise from the use of 'western' technology. However, such a construction of authority is not monolithic but depends on the kind of audiences which the Ulama have in mind. Zaman informs us that it is not unusual for the Ulama to speak in different and even contradictory voices depending upon their targeted readership and even the political context. In effect, therefore, Zaman's work desacralizes the Ulama, making them human and bringing them within the ambit of critical analysis like any other social category.

Against the notion of a homogenous Islam, Zaman brings out the plurality within the South Asian Ulama. He not only details the major sectarian division between the Sunnis and the Shias but also between different denominations (*maslaks*) of Ulama among the Sunnis such as the Deobandis, Barelwis, Ahl e Hadith, etc. Through an analysis of their writings, Zaman seeks to unravel the rival claims from the Ulama of all these denominations to represent 'true Islam'. Zaman argues that behind the façade of propagating 'true Islam', the reasons for radicalization of sectarian identities is to be found in more sociological causes such as urbanization and social dislocation. One hoped that Zaman would also describe the conditions under which Ulama of different and rival denominations forge a common platform as is witnessed in the case of Pakistan, an important aspect on which he is silent. Moreover, he does not tell us whether there is some process towards an ecumenical understanding among these various denominations or even the reasons for this crucial lack of interdenominational dialogue in contemporary Islam.

From sectarianism, Zaman goes on to discuss radicalism through a thought-provoking analysis of some madrasas. He argues that while there is sympathy for militant Islam among a section of the Ulama, they are in a tiny minority. Conceptions of the 'Islamic state' vary among the Ulama and most of them have a very ambiguous relationship with a militant Islamic movement like the Taliban. Zaman goes on to argue that the radicalization of some madrasas and Ulama in Pakistan is the result of their being used by the 'Pakistani political elite and the willingness of the Ulama to go along with this agenda'. It is here perhaps that Zaman's arguments need some rethinking. Through their writings and activities, Zaman makes us aware that the Ulama are not just a reactive social group; rather they have an agency of their own and make their own agenda. Yet when it comes to discussing increasing radicalism in Pakistan, Zaman somewhat dilutes the contribution of the Ulama in it. Moreover, as the work is comparative in nature, it would have been much better to have compared Ulama radicalism in Pakistan with India. There is a sense in which Zaman does not take into account the differential socio-political effects of the nature of state in both these countries. The fact that Pakistan, for all practical purposes, is an Islamic state means that claims to power and legitimacy there will follow a markedly different articulation as compared to India which is a secular state. Thus while it is true that the Ulama in both the countries see themselves as the 'guardians of the religious sphere', an important question to ask would be why the Indian Ulama have not charted the same radical path which their counterparts in Pakistan and elsewhere have done.

Zaman concludes that it would be naïve to write off the Ulama as important social and political actors in the future. Scholarship on the Muslim world will necessarily have to take into account the activities of the Ulama for any meaningful analysis. Zaman argues that even as they strive to 'demarcate and defend their own religious sphere', the Ulama will also 'continue to enlarge their audiences, to shape debates on the meaning and place of Islam in public life, to lead activist movements in pursuit of their ideals'. In short the Ulama will continue to be both custodians as well as the authoritative interpreters of Islam. Although he does not mention it himself, Zaman's formidable work is a necessary corrective to Francis Robinson's thesis that print enabled the formation of a Muslim public sphere in South Asia. Since theoretically any Muslim could participate in this public sphere, Robinson predicted that the authority of the Ulama as the official interpreters of Islam would decline, which will eventually lead to democratization of Muslim public life. Zaman has conclusively shown that the reality is far more fascinating and complex which should not be pigeonholed to suit European lenses. With extensive notes and bibliography, the book is a must for scholars interested in Muslim histories and especially those concerned with South Asia.

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Viewing Beyond Boundaries

Sabeena Gadihoke

IMAGI-NATIONS AND BORDERLESS TELEVISION: MEDIA, CULTURE AND POLITICS ACROSS ASIA
By Amos Owen Thomas
Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2005, pp.289, Rs.380.00

While quantitative research has been rightly critiqued for not being able to adequately address issues within social science research, one of the major problems facing those engaged in cultural studies especially around the media industry is access to facts and descriptive work. Available through market research and surveys, this information is often confidential, for the exclusive use of insiders in the industry. Seen against this backdrop, *Imagi-Nations and Borderless Television* by International Business scholar Amos Owen Thomas that uses a comprehensive descriptive and factual terrain to look at the phenomenon and spread of transnational television in Asia and some of its convergent cultures with scholarly rigour is a significant book for students and media researchers.

The great value of this book is its attention to detail and factual information about what Thomas terms "border-less television" or broadcasting through satellite footprints that are not limited to specific national and geographic terrains. It is also a welcome addition to scholarly work that has moved away from a market and economy driven discourse around globalization to one that views it within the context of multiple cultural flows. Laying out a history of satellite channels and tracing their origins, ownership and reach, Thomas examines the media scenario in three parts of Asia: South Asia (India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Maldives), South East Asia (Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Brunei) and North-East Asia (China, Japan, North and South Korea, Mongolia, Hong-Kong, Macau and Taiwan). He also makes a passing reference to television channels and satellites in the Middle East giving us insights into channels like Al Jazeera that shot into prominence during the second Gulf war. In a methodical (and rather self consciously) textbook like manner Thomas lays out the information, placing it against the backdrop of schools of communication, development models and theories on globalization. He adopts a quasi-ethnographic methodology that involves interviews with those engaged in media industries, viewing software and secondary local data.

Satellite broadcasting that came to Asia in its present form in the early and mid-nineties has been the scrutiny of earlier work. For instance among the more recent books to look at this scenario in Asia was Page and Crawley's *Satellites over South Asia: Broadcasting Culture and the Public Interest* (Sage, 2001), Dealing with a very vast terrain, the book suffered from an inability to engage with the specificities and complexities of media culture in South Asian communities, often making sweeping generalizations. While *Imagi-Nations* dispenses with making similar claims, it shares with the other book the perils of having too large a canvas that might overload the reader with too many facts and not enough connections between them.

Thomas has rightly pointed out the need for a sequel or sequels to this book. If anything, the book suffers from carrying too much of information that becomes at times overwhelming. In looking at an extremely vast terrain, it sometimes seems too 'model' and 'category' driven, and therefore does not account adequately for specificities. For instance while Thomas acknowledges the resistance and/or negotiation of audiences with software that is not always within their own national agendas pointing out how Indian audiences in the northern state of Punjab watch PTV or the engagement of Pakistani audiences with popular Indian film based channels, he is not able to give us a more layered insight into this phenomenon except in a passing mention. The central thesis of the book emerges only in the last two chapters where Thomas addresses some of the common anxieties that national governments have had around "the invasion from the skies." Culture is always a contested terrain and while transnational television brings with it a certain global (often interpreted as "western") culture, it has also created a situation where ethnic minorities within national boundaries have been able to have more choice and access through regional channels. The terrain of transnational television also transforms notions of national boundaries and national audiences addressing as it does through footprints a diverse audience that include diasporic communities in other parts of the world. In effect the broadcasting satellite model that was adopted by governments to "integrate" and "unify" their diverse populations has allowed for even more regional aspirations and specificities.

One of Thomas's stated objectives is to be able to have three "regional and comparative case studies on the development of transnational television in Asia" (p.243). focusing as he does on a detailed description of the Indian subcontinent, greater China and the Malay archipelago. He looks at the impact of borderless television on media industries, advertising and the responses of the state in these countries. Given the vastness of the universe of this book, this comparative framework over territories as huge as China, Taiwan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan and India blurs the large diversity between audiences on the basis of rural and urban divides, ethnicity, region, culture etc. Also, while he describes how transnational Television captured the imagination of audiences in these countries who were tired of the unimaginative public broadcasting under government regulated channels, what is lacking in his analysis is an engagement with television audiences who are no less significant a player in this debate. This is unfortunate as qualitative data of the kind in this book could have offered very rich insights into the complexities of audience responses that market surveys and trade data often gloss over because they lack the tools to interrogate categories such as "house-wife" or "primary wage owner" and their inherent heterogeneity and porosity. His analysis of ethnic channels for instance or the patterns of cable consuming households would have been richer had they not depended solely on ownership and distribution data.

Having made this critique, this still remains an extremely valuable book in terms of its rich access to information about South Asia. It would be a very useful tool for media scholars and students who wish to study telecommunications and globalization and this book should lay the grounds for new work that could push some of its arguments further. For instance while Thomas has referred to the regulatory responses of the state to satellite broadcasting, corporate censorship that is sometimes much more insidious has been ignored so far in most media analysis. *Imagi-Nations* has rightly pointed out how while state run channels and domestic channels were forced to alter themselves, partnerships and links also existed between the state and private interests such as advertisers, large conglomerates and smaller interests like local cable operators that have impacted on media policies. Regulation is therefore not limited to the state. Also as the book points out, despite the large reach of the transnational channels their viewership is still small compared to domestic channels and as a result they have needed to diversify into regional and sub ethnic programming in order to sustain themselves. In the final analysis, its is this complex negotiation between different players such as the state, commerce and the industry and an active heterogeneous audience that will need to be examined more carefully for patterns rather than any overarching theories of ownership and control.■

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Status of Interdisciplinary Studies

Vivek Kumar

SOCIAL SCIENCES IN PAKISTAN: A PROFILE
Edited by Inayatullah, Rubina Saigol, PervezTahir
Council of Social Sciences Pakistan, Islamabad, 2005, pp. 514, Rs.500.00 (US$ 20).

The book under review is the outcome of a Herculean task of reviewing the status of both pure and interdisciplinary disciplines of the social sciences in Pakistan. The review has been done on the basis of quantitative growth, qualitative development and identification of the factors that limited or fostered the disciplines. Without following any chronology of the development disciplines the editors have collected the articles on different disciplines randomly. For instance International relations which is relatively new and interdisciplinary subject has been discussed ahead of Economics, Anthropology or Sociology.

Three major challenges that the teaching and research in the field of International Relations in Pakistan face are, one, lack of theoretical orientation of the courses, second, its weak multidisciplinary character. The third challenge is the lack of nexus between the policy makers and the Pakistani academia (p.25). Inayatullah emphasizes that, "The discipline of Political Science in Pakistan compared to its counterparts in the West and India remains underdeveloped both quantitatively and qualitatively... The new developments in the discipline at the international level have only marginally touched it" (p.46). Ayesha Siddiqa mentions that Strategic Studies in Pakistan were the outcome of circumstances in which the armed forces started to build themselves after 1947 where there was no infrastructure for the building and training of armed forces. This discipline heavily relies on Economics, History, Sociology, Geography etc. A lengthy fifty page review on the state of Educational Discourse by Rubina Saigol argues, "Despite an extensive and intensive critique of the liberal structural-functional prardigm borrowed from the thought of Durkhiem and Parsons the majority of educators in Pakistan, remained caught within the structural-functional and liberal view of education as a social equalizer, instead of seeing it as one more source of inequality in society...Most of the curricular content in Pakistan remained hostage to the controversial two nation paradigm, especially in Social Studies, Pakistan Studies, Islamiyat and language teaching...While educators in India developed sophisticated critiques of how education reproduces the existing social order and class relationship...in Pakistan the mainstream educational establishment remained unaware of the worldwide scathing critiques of a liberal and positivist education" (p.81).

Mohammad Ashraf Adeel traces the 55-year-old history of discipline of Philosophy and emphasizes that Islamic Philosophy relating to Pakistani culture, its identity and problems is taught in all the departments. Further, these departments have been playing an important role in keeping Pakistan in contact with the intellectual life of the West. And argues that "interest in the Western Philosophy has been the continuous cultural challenge that the innovative and dynamic Western culture has continued to present to rather stagnant Islamic societies for the last many centuries"(p.135). The state of Psychology as a discipline can be judged by the fact that 80 to 90 per cent students are girls and there is no one who is known as a regular contributor to a magazine or newspaper. In this context Muhammad Pervez and Kamran Ahmad reveal, "In terms of the level of research, Psychology still has low contribution to overall understanding of social issues and psyche of the nation and development" (p.167). Kamran Ali depicts that Economics is one of the three disciplines that Pakistan inherited from pre-partition India, along with History and Political Science. He claims that there is an impressive quantitative growth in the field of Economics but qualitatively the subject has suffered because of the "production of applied economists who can contribute to the planned process of economic development of the country and almost indifference towards the production of economists that could contribute to the development of the discipline itself" (p.193). For Sociology in Pakistan Muhamamd Hafeez argues that since 1955 when sociology became an independent subject of study at MA level it has not played its envisaged role towards progress in Pakistani society. He writes, " The country remains fragmented politically, racially, religiously and ethnically...The division on the basis of religious sect and caste have swelled over the last two decades, which shows the little role this subject has played in addressing this important social problem" (p. 205).

Nadeem Omar Tarar opines that Anthropology started in the 1970s with the help of a large number of German and American anthropologists. The researchers have predominantly used an evolutionary and structural functionalist paradigm for their stereotypical studies of village community, castes, and tribes. The preferred area of research is in a process of social change in Pakistani rural society, especially in small communities and tribal groups (p.228). Writing about the development of History discipline Mubarak Ali portrays the scene: "Because of ideological consideration the subject has suffered immensely. To date no decision has been taken as to how to treat the ancient past. Should we ignore ancient history because it is pre-Islamic? How do we deal with the Mediaeval period, when Muslim dynasties ruled over India and Delhi and Agra were the centers of power, while the present territories of Pakistan were on the periphery of their Kingdoms? Some historians have tried to solve this problem by arguing that the history of Pakistan should start from 711-12 AD—the date of the Arab invasion of Sindh. Another approach suggests that the starting point should be 1947" (p.239).

Zafar Iqbal Jadoon and Nasira Jabeen argue that public finance, comparative administration, development administration were an integral part of the curriculum and the subject is becoming very popular as it has an ability to provide employment to students. Another subject, which is on high priority is Journalism and Mass Communication says Mehdi Hasan who traces its development since 1941. Writing on 'Area Studies in Pakistan' Muhammad Islam, reveals that it started in 1973 against the backdrop of 1971 crisis. This was approved by National Educational Policy because it was necessary to study the foreign societies, which affect the national interests of Pakistan and help in the policy formulation, he opines.

Syed Jaffar Ahmed argues that the numerous facts from historical, anthropological, religious, social, political, economic etc., were merged into a multidisciplinary framework to form the core of Pakistani Studies which were introduced in 1970. Now it has become a compulsory subject, taught at different levels of school and college education. Rubina Saigol defines the major objectives of Women's Studies in Pakistan as a critical examination of concepts, theories, models and methodologies that have been responsible for excluding or rendering women invisible in scientific investigation and development, incorporation of knowledge on women and contributions by women scholars, creation of awareness and sensitization about women issues at the community level, promotion of academic and action oriented research on women in development (p.357).

Moonis Ahmar & Farhan H. Siddiqui emphasize that though "Peace and Conflict Studies" help to understand why conflicts take place and how they could be prevented and resolved yet the discipline has not been institutionalized in Pakistan (p.390). One is astonished to hear that in a linguistically rich area like Pakistan Linguistics is not taught as an autonomous discipline. That is why there are no organizations and journals on the subject says, Tariq Rahman. 'NGOs to Social Science Research in Pakistan' by Anwar Shaheen depicts that at the turn of the century, the NGOs are growing with the functions of advocacy and research. Paper on Quantitative Development of Social Sciences by Pervez Tahir reveals that Pakistan has 17300 social scientists and 149 social science departments, institutes and centers and other related facts. The rigorous evaluation of social sciences disciplines is done with a vision that gives validity, accuracy and a scientific status.■

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"Diet of Honour and Shame"

Paromita Chakravarti

'HONOUR': CRIMES, PARADIGMS AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN
Edited by Lynn Welchman and Sara Hossain
Zubaan, New Delhi, 2006, pp.384, Rs. 595.00

THEY HANG
By Syeda S. Hamid
Women Unlimited, New Delhi, 2006, pp.183, Rs. 275.00

Shame!
'So are they all, all honourable men…' (Julius Caesar, 3.2.80)

School texts like Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* alerted us to the fact that men kill men in the name of honour. But one grows up to realize that far more women than men are killed by men for honour.

Chapter 7 of Salman Rushdie's novel, *Shame* begins with the story of a Pakistani father in the East End of London who "murdered his only child, a daughter, because by making love to a white boy she had brought such dishonour upon her family that only her blood could wash away the stain. The tragedy was intensified by the father's enormous and obvious love for his butchered child, and by the beleagured reluctance of his friends and relatives (all 'Asians', to use the confusing term of these trying days) to condemn his actions… The story appalled me when I heard it… I had recently become a father myself and was therefore newly capable of estimating how colossal a force would be required to make a man turn a knife-blade against his own flesh and blood. But even more appalling was my realization that, like the interviewed friends etc., I, too found myself understanding the killer. We who have grown up on a diet of honour and shame can still grasp what must seem unthinkable to peoples living in the aftermath of the death of God and of tragedy: that men will sacrifice their dearest love on the implacable altars of their pride. (And not only men. I have since heard of a case in which a woman committed the identical crime for identical reasons.) Between shame and shamelessness lies the axis upon which we turn; metereological conditions at both these poles are of the most extreme, ferocious type. Shamelessness, shame: the roots of violence." (*Shame*, Vintage, 1995, pp.115-16).

This extract crystallizes some of the most important issues surrounding the phenomenon of honour-crimes against women, the subject of the Lynn Welchman and Sara Hossain edited collection of articles entitled *'Honour', Crimes, Paradigms, and Violence against Women*. In the title, the single quotes around 'honour' clearly indicates its dubious ideology which renders crimes committed in its name, more shameful than honorable. Yet it is this notion of a social shaming, the perception of 'dishonour' brought upon the community, clan, tribe, caste or class by the action of a woman, a wife, daughter or sister which unleashes the most shameless of crimes on the part of men who are their relatives and intimates. These crimes are more shameless than others because they receive social endorsement. The most loving of fathers, like Rushdie's narrator, "brought up on a diet of honour and shame" understands the imperatives of the killer and sees the killing as a necessary sacrifice to male pride.

'Honour' emerged out of a five year collaborative, action-oriented research project, conducted by INTERLIGHTS, a London based international human rights organization and CIMEL, a research centre in the Law Department of the School of Oriental and African Studies, London. The project attempted to document and disseminate information regarding honour crimes as well as to develop strategies for combating them. The work was done by individuals and organizations from diverse regions, communities and cultures to understand the pervasiveness as well as the complexity and specificity of crimes which deploy an ideology of 'honour', to perpetuate violence against women who dare to transgress gendered behavioural or sexual norms, by exercising individual choice in marriage, work, movement or even in the clothes they wear. While 'honour crimes' follow familiar patterns of male violence against women, they are different from other crimes in the way that they use 'honour' as an excuse and in the way that the family and community endorse them. However, feminists have pointed out that using the term 'honour crime' unproblematically is to accept the justificatory framework within which it is placed by its perpetrators, it is to focus on the motivation rather than on the crime or the victim. The manifestation of such crimes is no different from any other case of rape, assault or femicide which must be punished under law. The term also obscures the real motives of the crime which are often economic, political or social (property or inheritance issues, a husband wanting to get rid of his wife etc.) rather than the maintenance of 'honour' which it purports to be. Besides, the naming of male violence as 'honour crime' also exoticizes and particularizes it as a cultural phenomenon specific to certain communities, which often makes state and international law reluctant to intervene in these situations.

The 'honour' code is identified primarily with 'backward', 'feudal' societies, usually of the 'third world', or immigrant, minority communities in the 'first world'. 'Honour crimes' become a marker of the regressiveness of the 'East' which allows the 'progressive' West to congratulate itself. *'Honour'* challenge these stereotypes. Bettiga-Boukerbout's essay on the status of 'crimes of honour' in the Italian penal code and the 'legitimate defence of honour' used in case law in Latin America alert us to the oppression of women built into certain European Catholic cultures which valorize machismo and use it as a legitimate defence for 'honour crimes'. These articles also point out how western legislations on 'crimes of passion' mitigate responsibility for male violence against women through arguments of 'grave and sudden provocation' implicit in which are notions of 'honour'. Equally 'honour killings' in Pakistan and elsewhere often use the defence that the crimes were committed in a 'fit of fury' or passion.

However, distinctions must be made between crimes of passion and 'honour crimes' because while one is an individual offence, the other enjoys social sanction and often represents collective decisions of a family or the community. As such 'honour crimes' cannot be combated merely through law. While many of the essays in the volume make a plea for strong national laws and international conventions on 'honour crimes' there is also a clear recognition of the need for community based, ground level changes. Abdullahi Ahmed An-Naim's article argues perhaps a little problematically, that in combating 'honour crimes', we must not alienate the community. We should attack the violent act rather than the 'honour' ideology behind it. The state should not intervene too actively in what may be seen as a 'private' domain of family and community and international bodies too should work only through local groups who enjoy the confidence of the people. While a human rights approach is useful, it should not become a tool for the UN and other international bodies to interfere in domestic matters, particularly of developing, Islamic countries. We should never forget that the US attack on Iraq was done on the plea of human rights violation of Iraqi citizens. An-Naim's article sensitizes us to how besieged Islamic societies feel in the aftermath of the 9/11 backlash. In this context we might remember how when Mukhtaran Mai's (the woman from the Tatla vclaan who was gangraped in June 2002 in a village in Pakistan as a 'punishment' delivered by a local body of the Mastoi clan, the enemies of the Tatlas, for her brother's alleged 'dishonouring' of a Mastoi girl and who then went on to move court and get her rapists punished. The case received wide publicity particularly through Mukhtaran Mai's account of the rape which was published in French as *Deshonoree*) crusade was taken up by an international community, it created great internal disturbances in Pakistan. The case demonstrates how the issue of violence against women focuses on the bristly

interfaces of community and state, nation and international bodies, local governments and global forces. Uma Chakravarti's article issues an important caveat against seeing 'honour crimes', as the West seems to do, as a problem of Muslim societies. 'Honour crimes' are very much a part of the Hindu communities of North India and are connected with the fundamentalist agenda of the Hindu right.

The rich body of sixteen essays, culled from different communities, religious persuasions and belief structures from all over the world are related to each other dialectically and dialogically. They set out different aspects of the major debates on 'honour crimes' while providing a vast array of geographically and historically located empirical data about the specific contexts of their occurrences. *'Honour'* gives an authoritative overview of available information, theoretical frameworks as well as strategies of combating 'honour crimes'. However what is perhaps missing in the volume is a discussion of 'honour killings' of women (and men) who profess or practice same sex love. The feminist movement has often been accused of having a heterosexist bias which results in the glossing over of crimes against lesbians and bisexuals. In later editions it might be useful to 'queer' the volume.

Another omission seems to be the absence of any sustained discussion on the ideology of 'honour' not as a justificatory framework but as a complex belief system which works in diverse ways. The volume seems to have an exclusive focus on crimes committed by male perpetrators on women in the name of upholding the 'honour' code. But women equally internalize and perpetuate this code which manifests itself not only through killings and assaults of women by men but also through suicides of women egged on by other women relatives and community members. The phenomenon of 'sati' and its revival in the discourse of Hindutva and the glorifying rhetoric surrounding '*jauhar*' and '*agnipariksha*'(fire ordeal) which are reiterated through women's quotidian puja rituals, through 'path', 'katha' and oral narratives of the *puranas* and epics (now also through television serials) needs to be understood for example. Only then can we begin to grasp how the *Durga vahini* women could play such active and gory roles in the rapes, murders and 'dishonouring' of Muslim women in the Gujarat riots or how thousands of Punjabi women could jump into wells, clutching their infants to save their 'honour' from the Muslims during Partition. Given the pervasiveness and deeprootedness of the 'honour' ideology is there really any hope of combating these crimes? Perhaps the only redressal left to us is that of incessant and vigilant discourse and debate and the relentless recording of events which may be used as evidence in the modification of existing laws, framing of new legislations and policies preventing violence against women.

It is precisely this task that is taken up by Syeda S. Hamid in her ambiguously titled *They hang* which provides us with poignant accounts of episodes of violence faced by twelve women Hamid met as a member of the National Women's Commission between 1997-2000. Hamid calls the genre she uses, 'factition' or a mix of fact and fiction which she uses deftly to craft deeply sensitive portraits of suffering women. They cease to be 'cases' filed away in the dusty shelves of the NCW and become vibrant pictures who 'hang' in a gallery, powerfully pleading for remembrance if not justice. Since their violators will never 'hang', the least we can do is save them from oblivion.

The academic discourse, theoretical debates and statistics of *'Honour'* are as if fleshed out in the heart rending 'stories' of *They hang*. The very first narrative about Maimun, who is raped, cut up and perhaps finally killed for marrying the man of her choice highlights many of the issues discussed in '*Honour*'. The failure of the NCW in getting Maimun's community to accept her marriage exemplifies the problems of external intervention, mentioned by An-Naim in his article in '*Honour*'. The gruesome account of the gang rape of the two sisters, Gudiya and Yashodha (and their old mother-in-law) as a reprisal for the 'dishonour' brought upon the village by their brother's elopement with a girl of his choice is starkly narrated without any respite from details nor any comfort of hope. Jahanara's tale brings out the fissures within the ideology of 'honour' by showing how in the criminalized Bedia community, women are expected not to maintain the community 'honour' through their chastity but to fend for the community by prostituting themselves.

The women in Hamid's portrait gallery are diverse in terms of their location, class, religion, education, as also their agency. But in spite of having varying degrees of control over their environment they all finally fail to influence it in a lasting and meaningful way. The tribal girl Lily Lakra taken out of her village, sent abroad as domestic help and sexually assaulted by her employer and Sajoni, an adivasi woman who is accused of being a '*dayan*' (witch) are at one end of spectrum while the three teachers, Juhi, Shaista, Kadambari, employed in a posh Delhi public school are at the other. Yet all five women suffer severe forms of sexual harassment at work or, as in the case of Sajoni, because she decides to plough the field, work traditionally regarded as a man's. Although the specificities of their life experiences are never glossed over, they are placed in a continuum of women's experiences and suffering. The book is powerfully and unabashedly a solidarity building exercise through the sharing of narratives— not just between the women in the portrait gallery and their relatives who could derive strength from togetherness, (there are touching accounts of the parents of girls who suffered dowry deaths coming together after their daughters' deaths and sharing grief), but also between the reader and the author.

Although the narratives clearly seek to indict the male tormentors of the twelve women, men are not simply presented as one-dimensional villains in the 'stories'. The helpless fathers of daughters tortured in their husbands' homes or sympathetic characters like the Raja's son in Jahanara's tale, who risks death if the secret of his shrunken penis is revealed by the women he is forced to lie with, are presented with sensitivity, as fellow victims of patriarchy.

Yet the women are not just victims. If nothing else, Hamid gives them the power to recount their own stories. But through their stories glimpses of the master-narrator emerge. Her deep humility faced with indescribable human suffering, her empathy for the women she meets as also her frustration and weariness at her failure to redress their wrongs comes across strongly. In spite of the wide range of her experiences, she is painfully aware of the gap between her life and the extraordinary stories of the 'cases' she handles. This is wittily conveyed when she begins to mentally recite Yeats' poem, 'Among Schoolchildren' when she visits the ashram-school in Morena, only to smile at the incongruity of her action. It is only as the story progresses that the full import of this incongruity hits us. We realize that this ashram for little girls is a desperate attempt on the Principal's part to keep them from plying their traditional trade of prostitution. Despite such ironies, the narrator shows a conviction in and appeals to a common femininity and humanity. The book remains a courageous account of failures but strongly inflected with the belief that through the tireless telling and retelling of tales, the public memory can at least be kept alive:

> Their stories need to be told so that they are not lost in the official records of the state; so that they are heard by a people's bench; so that they are not erased from public memory."
>
> (*They hang*, Introduction, p.x)

We have to keep turning the patriarchal tales of honour into female accounts of shame. We must learn to blush on behalf of those who should be ashamed, the custodians of 'honour' who dishonour humanity, like the ever blushing, slightly demented girl Sufiya Zenobia in Rushdie's *Shame* who was, in a previous birth, the East End girl killed by her father for loving the wrong boy.■

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A Troubled Relationship

Kalpana Kannabiran

FEMINIST POST-DEVELOPMENT THOUGHT: RETHINKING MODERNITY, POST-COLONIALISM AND REPRESENTATION
Edited by Kriemild Saunders
Zubaan, New Delhi, and Zed Books, New York & London, 2004 (originally published by Zed Books in 2002), pp.368, price not stated.

The place of women in development praxis has always been contested and troubling. This volume opens out the complex feminist debates in different geographic locations, simultaneously placing before us *difference* in feminist theorizing and the critical feminist engagements locally and globally with hegemonic forces of development especially over the past three decades.

The introduction traces the trajectory of feminist post-development thought from WID (which assumed "the withering away of patriarchal ideology") through GAD (which was "concerned to unearth gender as an ideological construct") to southern perspectives on the imperatives of feminist developmentalism, notably DAWN. Esther Boserup's pathbreaking work on developing a feminist vision of the development process in 1970, which challenged in very fundamental ways the assumption that the benefits of development would trickle down to the poor, by demonstrating women's declining status provides the starting point for a discussion on the complexity of development debates and the positioning of women therein. Southern and subaltern perspectives present crucial turning points in this debate. While DAWN is a signpost of southern perspectives, Saunders argues in the introduction there is a sliding of the narrative between poor illiterate southern women, that DAWN represents and the intellectual class that is the vanguard of DAWN, the fact of this separateness between the represented and those that represent being completely masked. She examines the theorizing of the Third World/ Southern woman away from monolithic, essentializing narratives after Gayatri Spivak's work on the representation of subaltern women. An important part of this theorizing has looked at questions of cosmology, colonial residues, regeneration and the idea of modernity itself. Along different points on this continuum there are other signposts that have been prolific in their production of research and practice.

We can perhaps trace the articulation of women's rights from the early era of emancipation to liberation and finally to "empowerment"—"a slippery word, a chimera that lets everyone feel comfortable—a 'motherhood' term with a warm, cuddly feeling" (Papart, p. 52). The emergence of the concept of empowerment in development debates led to the rise of participatory rural appraisal (PRA)—a dynamic set of techniques aimed at enhancing participation and empowerment of the poorest of the poor. However, Papart argues, the fact that the analytical tools of political economy that address questions of state power, institutions, global trade flows were left completely out of the reckoning in PRA resulted in the participation being merely just that without any empowerment or voice in the terms of real, sustainable change.

What then is the road to getting heard? What *are* the tools with which we may dismantle the master's house? Taking note of the power of the master's tools, whether at the local or the global level, mastering them and subverting them to the benefit of women has been one route (open to the accusation of cooptation). Staying on the outside, Kathleen Staudt suggests, will mean that the master's houses get more hegemonic and powerful. It is only collaboration between the insider and the outsider, broad based transformative coalitions, she says which will challenge, change and transform the institutions that comprise the master's house. And this challenge to the master's house from within is something that has a rich history, especially where women have posed this challenge. Through a textured biography of Dolcha Rińgmo, a Ladakhi Buddhist woman who spent most of her life in the marketplace in Leh, Raveena Aggarwal presents to us strategic possibilities for the contestation of structural inequalities.

In the section on the feminization of the global economy, opening with an examination of 'counter-geographies of globalization' – circuits that are at the heart of the global economy and yet are not often represented as being connected to globalization (p.104). In a context that is increasingly marked by high unemployment, poverty, bankruptcy of firms, and shrinking allocation of resources on social needs, alternative circuits of survival emerge. Saskia Sassen argues that these circuits earn vital remittances for states and present attractive profit making options to those who run them. Trafficking is the immediate example that comes to mind – related to the sex market, the labour market and illegal migration. While sex trafficking and illegal migration multiply the resources of criminal groups, labour market trafficking bolsters up foreign exchange in sending states and helps them cope with unemployment at home.

This putting in place of alternative circuits, and the structured changes in a wide range of areas – socially, politically and economically – prompts Marianne Marchand to use global restructuring instead of globalization. She argues that the processes and transformations that are part of this restructuring tend to result in social exclusion, and are mediated by gender, ethnicity, class and other social factors – producing and reproducing inequality even while creating new opportunities.

In the face of the complexities of development praxis, and the pitfalls even, resistance becomes a central concern. This resistance however, must carefully negotiate a route out of oversimplified dichotomies of the Third World/First World and the language of Otherness. "An 'alternative' theory of development," Marnia Lazreg cautions us, "must take into consideration the fact that people living on the *under* side of development are our contemporaries, and that to romanticize their circumstances is to do them violence. This is particularly relevant to arguments of cultural preservation or the grounding of identity, which she sees as expressive of the view of development as destruction, not as transformative. A closer look at debates in these "Other" places – China, for instance—demonstrates potentially powerful desires to do away with male dominance through "cultural spaces kept open through seemingly endless bruising struggles (that) feed desires for things beyond our present damaging conditions of gendered power." (Tani Barlow, p.156) Meera Nanda similarly examines local realities that are particularly oppressive—the example she takes is of caste in India – and the movements of the oppressed, which I will return to a little later.

And yet, in the Andes, ideas of regeneration are predicated on the experience of the earth with all its inhabitants – humans and more-than-humans. Frederique Appfel Marglin and Loyda Sanchez argue that in a society where the notion of person is radically non-essentialist, and not necessarily contained within the biological body, the imposition of developmentalist feminism and its notions of gender is incongruous in its anthropocentrism and its eurocentrism. Scientific discourses coupled with trade practices based on similar assumptions present even greater risks to human survival – the decision of the European Union to lift its ban on possibly BSE infected UK beef to Third World countries. Looking at the trends in the use of science, Vandana Shiva charges that in the "economics of genocide, the largely white male elite of the North creates, class, race and gender boundaries to exclude other social groups from the fundamental human rights to life and safety." [p. 189] Banu Subramaniam, James Bever and Peggy Schultz, located within the discipline of biology, explore the possibilities of a science that is not anthropocentric and that looks at local ecologies, cultures, histories and geographies in its negotiations of the material and the discursive, so that new conditions may be created which will allow for the realization of a

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new vision of post-development. The possibilities of science as also the history of arguing in favour of the rationality of modern science—in the Enlightenment mode—is located in anti-caste movements in India – with both Ambedkar and Periyar challenging Brahminical knowledge of the natural world as being unscientific. The scientific temper was seen to be the most effective tool of transformation. "An *enabling* critique of development," Meera Nanda suggests, "must engage in a cultural challenge to this inherited discourse of patriarchy, caste and other inequities justified by traditional cosmologies" (p. 223).

Fieldwork has always raised a host of very uncomfortable questions—and has been theorized as well. Development practice has foregounded participatory engagements. Even so, do 'advances' in knowledge actually improve the condition of people who enable this 'participation'? (Patience Elabor-Idemudia, 227-242) The position of the ethnographer, especially when she is located in a dominant group; the accessibility of her research to the people on whose lives it is based; the choices that people make consciously rejecting the structures of dominance – funding for instance; and their willingness to discuss all these questions with the *memsahib* ethnographer, points to the contradictions of fieldwork as they emerge in Piya Chatterjee's account of workers in the tea plantations in North Bengal. Tourism has across the world destroyed local economies and distorted them in troubling ways. While violence through widespread sex tourism is one part of this reality, the increasing displacement of men from steady employment, the absorption of women at various levels of the tourist economy and the consequent unleashing of patriarchal violence on women within their homes and communities makes women even more vulnerable. Ramona Perez examines the ritualization of male violence against women during fiestas in Atzompa outside Mexico, suggesting that women perhaps believe that this 'contains' domestic violence in reality and provides channels for the venting out of male frustration.

In the concluding section that examines issues related to population control and reproductive rights, Wendy Harcourt discusses the discursive shift in the ICPD in Cairo from population expansion to women's rights and empowerment; Esther Wangari discusses the ideological underpinnings of debates that link fertility rates to resource depletion, looking at these debates in the context of western consumption patterns and the imposition of harmful reproductive technologies on women of the South; Sylvia Marcos returns to some of the concerns voiced earlier in the volume arising from culturally and politically distinct notions of corporeality in the Meso American region that sets it apart from western notions of the body.

The collection revisits important debates and re-examines old questions—a necessary exercise, inconclusive by definition, but valuable in that all the patches are sewn together in one quilt, the seams telling the story of development.■

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Myriad Forms of Aggression

Geeta Ramaseshan

THE VIOLENCE OF NORMAL TIMES: ESSAYS ON WOMEN'S LIVED REALITIES
Edited by Kalpana Kannabiran
Women Unlimited, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 386, Rs. 500.00

Women experience violence in myriad forms and changing political, social and economic structures have a deep impact in the way violence against women reconstitutes itself. Such violence brings forth complex realities and permeates all categories of women though the nature of violence would differ between different groups, classes and in different times. In the post-emergency period the focus of the discourse on violence against women was on concerns such as custodial rape and marital violence that was primarily linked to dowry. This gave rise to a series of legislations in this area. The eighties and nineties saw a shift in the discourse as fresh complexities arose with the rise of religious fundamentalism, identity politics, economic liberalization, increasing caste violence and internal displacement of large communities particularly adivasis. The violence that was unleashed in Gujarat in 2002 raised a host of concerns that has still left us benumbed as it did it in 1984 when violence was unleashed on members of the Sikh community.

The book in review addresses a slice of the kinds of violence faced by women. With a collection of ten essays and a rich introduction by the editor, the volume traces the development of a feminist understanding of violence against women across various fields. It also represents the range of writing that has been generated by the politics of women's movements in India. The essays cover a wide range topics starting from the traditional justice systems in India and gender relations in Adivasi communities, to women working in Export Processing Zones, lesbian women, women who are targets of communal hatred and the Gujarat Catastrophe. The essays explore various disciplinary standpoints in different locales. While much written themes such as dowry have been left out, the existing themes in the volume add a lot to the study of this subject and actually force a re-examination of the ways in which violence has been welded to the question of rights. The themes have been chosen with great care and include many issues that do not find a part in mainstream discourse.

In an exhaustive introduction Kannabiran addresses the complexity of violence that " locks women of different classes, castes and communities into multiple intersecting axes of inequality and discrimination that spread over a wide range—from social and economic life to political inequality—tying women of different classes together through the similarity of their experiences as women and holding them apart in almost unbridgeable ways through the differences in their experiences as members of different social classes." She includes a range of concerns such as practices of sexual violence against dalit women, right to survival among adivasi women and sexual harassment in the workplace outside salaried employment to name a few. Tracing the violence of caste and its link to gender in the Indian context, she stresses that the experience of dalit women gets written out of the ream of "women's rights" and gets "segregated" as a caste issue or vice versa disregarding the fact that there are interlocking mechanisms of dominance that together produce the vulnerability of dalit women. The segregation in civil society is reproduced in the law, so that the progressive articulations of justice for women, to the extent that they are available, become irrelevant to women of underprivileged classes. The introduction sets the pace of the book.

Vasudha Dhagamwar's "*The Shoe fitted me and I wore it....*" 'Women and Traditional Justice Systems in India', is a chilling narrative on disputes settled by caste panchayats that have their own substantive customs, traditions and procedures as well as rules of evidence. The violence meted to women starts from the way adjudication takes place, to the customs, procedures and rules for evidence, to the panchayat's perception of women. Her essay examines in great detail the working of these panchayats drawing upon the experiences and writings of dalit writers. There is very little documentation on how disputes get settled in the nonformal legal system and this essay is a very valuable contribution to an area which a lot more needs to be written about. Dev Nathan and Govind Kelkar in their essay, 'Women as Witches and Keepers of Demons' analyse the phenomena of witches and witch hunting among the Santal and Munda communities in Jharkand. In the 'Trauma of "Wage Employment" and the "burden of work" for women in India', Padmini Swaminathan, addresses the violence on "gender biased development." Swaminathan bases her observations on narratives of women workers in the Madras Export Processing Zone. MEPZs are outside the pale of all labour laws and her paper offers a rare insight into the concerns of women working in MEPZ.

In 1994 mass hysterectomies performed on women inmates of a mentally retarded institution in Pune caused a big furore. Rajeswari Sunder Rajan focuses on this case in her detailed essay and raises the complex question about institutionalization in/ and the postcolonial state—about the extent of the state's responsibilities and the limits of its control in relation to dependant citizens—and to explore strategies of social protest and struggle. Anjali Dave in her essay addresses the discipline of social work and its shifting patterns, the response of the criminal justice system to violence against women and the experience of the Special Cell for Women and Children.

In 'The Psychology of Domestic Violence', U. Vindhya addresses violence as a multifaceted phenomenon grounded in interplay of psychological, situational and socio-cultural factors. Basing her research on the etiology of domestic violence, she illustrates the multiplicity of coexisting perspectives ranging from psychological models of individual pathology and dysfunctional dynamics to social-structural and feminist explanations.

Bin Fernandez and Gomathy N.B. address the violence faced by lesbian women in India. The authors begin with a discussion of the complex intersections between gender and sexuality, and how people who transgress socially ascribed gender and sexuality roles become vulnerable to violence. Outlining the existing theoretical frameworks analysing violence against homosexuals they argue that institutional proscriptions against homosexuality act as a mandate for violence against lesbians and gays. The essay also discusses the intersections and the points of difference between the discourses on violence against women and violence against lesbians.

Pratiksha Baxi's 'The Medicalisation of Consent and Falsity; The Figure of the Habitue in Indian Rape law' is a strong comment on the development of medical jurisprudence in rape law. While a large portion of the debate on reform of rape law in India has been in the area of evidentiary requirement of consent little attention has been paid to the requirement of expert evidence. The presence or absence of hymen is still an issue in rape trials and is used to attack the testimony of the women. The "two finger" test (that would indicate that two fingers could easily enter the vagina) is often used as an indicator to lead to the inference of virginity or sexual experience. Women victims—survivors of rape have to undergo this test on medical examination by the doctor who is then a crucial expert witness to the case. In her fine critique, Baxi observes, "the symbolic re-rape of women and female children by medico-legal techniques such as the two finger test describes how the particularized feminized body is wounded mimetically for society to name its humiliation. This acknowledgement is predicted on a repetition of the very act of humiliation for which the law is moved in the first place. We must ask ourselves how medico-legal techniques are deployed on women's bodies when rape continues to be normalized in courts of law."

The last two essays relate to Gujarat. Syeda Hameed in her essay describes her experience first as a member of the Women's Commission encountering gendered violence in the country and later as a member of a fact-finding team that went to Gujarat after the violence. Describing the testimonies she observes, " none of us who were members of the fact finding team have ever been the same again. Nothing that we had read or watched on television screens had prepared us for what we saw." It is the testimonies that need to be told again and again lest the events slip our collective consciousness.

Upendra Baxi's 'The Gujarat Catastrophe: Notes on Reading Politics as Democidal Rape Culture', situates the experience of violence and trauma in Gujarat in the larger context of the creation of hegemonic, religio-political apparatuses and ideological formations that are predicated on the enforcement of rape cultures. Addressing the question of what is "post Gujarat 2002", Dr. Baxi analyses it in eight ways. First, it constitutes a temporal register for practices of power with the return of Narendra Modi. "Second, the prefix also constructs the temporal register of many after-the-event diverse practices of politics for human rights. Third, the term also indicates the shattered lives of survivors of the catastrophe. Fourth, the prefix de-politicizes a political programme into a genre of criminal violence by randomly bringing to public view the individualized suspects, accused or miscreants while mystifying the community of perpetrators." Fifth, the difficulty in comprehending the term in view of the meta discourse of secularism in India, sixth, questions concerning globalizations and the kinds of impacts this has had for political, mass media, popular and academic represen-]tations of the violence, seventh, the role of persons of Indian origins worldwide in playing a *Hindutva orchestrated Jehadi role.* And the last poser, "How may 'we' avoid complicity in the practices of re-writing as violence?■

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Book News	Book News

Migrant Women And Work edited by Anuja Agrawal, Volume 4 of the Women and Migration in Asia Series, focussing on Asian women who migrate globally or across the Asian continent or within their respective countries in order to seek work, argues that the structural ramifications of women's migration plays an important role in shaping gender relations in the societies of both migrant and host.
Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 226, Rs. 350.00

Movement in Stills: The Dance and Life of Kumudini Lakhia by Reena Shah, told through the refracted lens of the writer and dance students, offers a blend of biography and personal impression to depict the life and dance of one of India's great performing artists.
MapinLit (An imprint of Mapin Publishing), Ahmedabad, 2005, pp. 318, price not mentioned.

God's Little Soldiers by Kiran Nagarkar is a modern-day allegory which highlights the dangers of religious extremism of all hues.
HarperCollins, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 556, Rs. 595.00

Parables of a Time Gone By

V. Geetha

IN THE PATH OF SERVICE : MEMORIES OF A CHANGING CENTURY
By Ashoka Gupta. Translated from the Bengali by Sipra Bhattacharya with Ranjana Dasgupta
Stree, Calcutta, 2005, pp. 254, Rs. 450.00

MY REMINSCENCES: SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT DURING THE GANDHIAN ERA AND AFTER
By Renuka Ray
Stree, Calcutta, 2005, pp. 271, Rs. 350.00

These two books are parables of a time when India was emerging into its nationhood. They encapsulate a complex social history—of a generation that attained adulthood in colonial India and citizenship in independent India and Pakistan.

Ashoka Gupta's is a Gandhian tale of an intelligent, capable woman, given over to domesticity, and well-versed in an ethics of care, who comes to assume social responsibility and authority when she is required to. It begins as the story of a woman from a well-endowed Bengali family married living in Rajasthan – of Jyotirmoyee Devi, who is married into a home in western India and finds herself widowed. Undaunted, she works hard to attain a life of dignified independence and establishes herself as a writer. Her efforts to raise her daughters to be educated, feisty and free in their marital and other choices are particularly moving. Ashoka Gupta tells a simple, lucid story marked by memory and recall.

In the telling of it, her story, of how moved into domesticity from a free, unfettered existence as a happy college student becomes as a bustling tale of weddings, childbirths, family events, and most of all, work, the endless labour of women expended in care and nurture. It is also a tale of a life that is haunted by the colonial civil service. Wedded to a man who works for the Raj and is conscious of his duties, but who is also quietly and firmly nationalist, Ashoka Gupta lives the life of 'a rover', as she puts, it, travelling the lengths of riverine Bengal on the one hand and the forests of Dandakaranya on the other. Here are entertaining vignettes of life in the tehsil and moffusil, the charm of which is punctuated by historical events and circumstances. Quit India, the war and the great Bengal famine of the 1940s catapults Ashoka Gupta into public life – which, until then, she had only known through fund-raising efforts for organizations such the All India Women's Conference. She also finds herself at this point in her life, wanting to look beyond the household and its demands. Working to run public kitchens and rehabilitation centers in the wake of the famine, and to provide women with work, she discovers how the discipline and relentless nature of domestic work, so familiar to her since her early youth, actually stands her in good stead now. She realizes how an ethic of care can animate public service and bring to it a nurturing edge.

Noakhali proves a turning point, as she meets Gandhi who enlists her, as he did other women, in his work in that destroyed district. Inspired by his faith in her abilities, though retaining her critical perspective, she plunges into relief work, infant daughter by her side. Partition brings with it other worries and the rehabilitation of families falls into the care of women such as her, first in Calcutta and later on in Dandakaranya, which was chosen by the Government of India as a fit place to rehabilitate families from East Bengal. This good work continues in independent India, under the auspices of the Central Social Welfare Board, Girl Guides organizations.

Renuka Ray's life story follows a similar trajectory. But, unlike Ashoka Gupta's story that does not always separate her public responsibilities from her domestic ones, and which actually appears to seamlessly link the two, Renuka Ray's is a self-consciously political narrative – of a woman determined to pursue a life of the mind and public service. In this sense, it is less a Gandhian parable, though the life narrated here is more intimately linked with the Mahatma's than is Ashoka Gupta's. Fascinating episodes from the life include the chapters on the author's days at the London School of Economics, (which puts one in mind of Eric Hobsawm's magnificent tribute, in *Interesting Times*, to the cosmopolitan culture that prevailed there in the years between the wars and the politics it nurtured); the time spent in the central legislative assembly and of course undertaking relief work during the Bengal famine and in the post-Partition days. Except in the early chapters, Renuka Ray does not dwell nearly enough on her personal life and entanglement. Thus, we do not get a sense of that call of domestic duty or the anxieties borne out of nurture and care, which are central to Ashoka Gupta's account of her life. But the life that unfolds compels attention by the manner in which Ray glosses political ideas, positions and events incisively and critically. Her accounts of her time in free India's governments, both in Bengal and the Centre are particularly interesting, for the judgments it offers of political figures, thinkers and leaders.

This is a Nehruvian text in every sense, which dwells long and lovingly on nation building in an institutional and political sense, whereas Ashoka Gupta's is embedded in a civic rather than a political understanding of the nation. Renuka Ray's story is unique, though, in that it produces for the reader a nuanced sense of what it meant to be a strong-willed, intelligent woman in politics, and one who would not compromise on her beliefs, or commitment to the cause of gender justice – this is particularly evident in the account of her time in the Constituent assembly and later of the Hindu code bill and how it was successfully scuttled at the time that Dr Ambedkar announced it.

The last third of the book comprises essays on various themes – history and the times retreat and we are privy to reasonable musings on governance, education and economic justice. The woman who comes into her own in her public roles and responsibilities slowly but surely grows into a public persona, whose sense of the world and all that may be yet done with it becomes crucially linked to policy, planning and administration.

Taken together, these books fill in the details of that critical historical period between what is conventionally considered the first and second wave of Indian feminisms: between the era of social reform and nationalism and the period the early 1970s and after. Curiously, not much attention has been paid to these years – except in Ilina Sen's perceptive introduction to *A Space within the Struggle* (Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1994). Radha Kumar's *History of Doing* (Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1993) does refer to this period, but one does not get a sense of the texture of the times from her writing. Even Indu Agnihotri's and Vina Mazumdar's 1995 essay on Indian women's movements (*Economic and Political Weekly*, July 22, 1995) begins its account from the 1970s, without so much as referring to this extraordinary period of ruling and building and the women that made this possible.

But clearly the early nation-building decades are of momentous importance, and autobiographies such as these do point to the immense efforts undertaken to frame policy and translate political dictates into meaningful action on the ground. These were not, of course, defiant years, nor did they fundamentally interrogate the details or basis of Indian nationalism; neither its class and caste character nor its inscription within a civilizational narrative that privileged aspects of Hindusim. But this does not mean that issues of caste and faith were not discussed – indeed they were and as Ashoka Gupta points out, for her and others inspired by Gandhi's work with 'harijans', anti-untouchability measures were essentially part of a deeply felt personal ethics and had to be embodied in one's own life. Further, as both women note, religion and

nationality were things one lived out in one's life, as men and women of their generation strove to translate into reality a secular worldview that inspired and charmed them.

How do we theorize their nation-building efforts? Do we consider them 'elitist' women who used their class and caste networks, both tacitly and because they inherited or were born to them, to advocate a liberal politics, of which they remained the privileged spokespersons? This appears too pat a critique, since privileged though they were, they responded to their conditions of existence fairly critically, enlisting themselves in the service of the commonweal. They also had more than a tangential relationship, as their life stories reveal, with poverty, injustice, caste humiliation and religious intolerance. They engaged with these issues, making crucial choices as they negotiated their responses to instances of inequality.

Women such as these were also clearly not the carriers of the ideal of tranquil, inner domesticity that resolved political tensions by recasting them as sexual and spiritual dilemmas, as Partha Chatterjee once had us believe. Neither are they 'revolutionary' women, spurning home and hearth for a militant underground life. It is possible to see them as Gandhian women, though neither woman answers to the ideological description of such women that Mala Khullar, for instance, provides, quoting Sarojini Naidu (Khullar, Zubaan, New Delhi, 2005).

Perhaps the answer lies in attending to the structure of feeling that appeared to govern these lives, to the manner in which differences between the public and the private, the political and the domestic were complicated and recast. In Ashoka Gupta's case, a pre-political life, lived within the precincts of an extended family and kin network, enables her transition into public work, and to this latter she brings an ethics of care, that is both affective and moral: embedded in practices of love and affection as well as a duty that one has to stand by. In Renuka Ray's case, the world of politics frames her sense of who she is, and her chosen vocation. The domestic, as I have noted above, does not appear relevant or significant, yet her many references to a happy companionate conjugality points to a condition that appears characteristic of its time and place; when a sense of working for the nation wedded not merely hearts and bodies, but souls and minds as well. Also, in her case, the domestic was transfigured to represent a world of hard-working, intelligent women who must be granted their rights and allowed their dignity.

There are yet some disconcerting moments in these amazing lives. With Renuka Ray, this has to do with Dr Ambedkar and the left in Bengal and with Ashoka Gupta, her sense of partition and the justice owed to Bengali refugees. Renuka Ray is thoroughly conscious of the many disabilities that Dr Ambedkar laboured under as chairman of the Constitution drafting committee, yet it does not appear that she grants him his historical due entirely – especially his heroic and unrelenting effort to carry the Constituent Assembly with him on the subject of first, the fundamental rights and later, the Hindu code bill. This latter appears inexplicable, since apart from a few liberals, it was women like her who endorsed the bill! Likewise, Renuka Ray is not fully fair to the left parties in the Bengal assembly and their principled opposition to the Congress – they appear chiefly as gentlemanly trouble-makers.

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These moments of unease do not take away from the essential richness of these texts, which testify to the good faith of those generations that fought for independence and attempted to realize it in practice.

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Abodes of Learning

Anne Vaugier Chatterjee

BASIC EDUCATION IN RURAL PAKISTAN – A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF GOVERNMENT, PRIVATE AND NGO SCHOOLS
By Shahrukh Rafi Khan
Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2006, pp. 181, Rs. 495.00

The book under review is topical in that discussions on education are both neverending and never seem to go out of fashion. For example, one only needs to recall that the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) just launched its 2006 'Global Report on Education for All (EFA) by the year 2015', in which it stated that overall steady progress had been made since 1998 towards the attainment of goals of universal primary education and that primary school enrolment had gone up sharply in several world regions (South Asia included, of course) that had been lagging behind till then.

This academic book aims at providing a status report on education in the five politico-administrative units of Pakistan. It also explores the ways and means by which the public sector can ensure a more efficient and effective achievement of primary school objectives in the rural areas of that country. This analysis is the product of relatively small sample surveys carried out in the four provinces and a federal administered territory of Pakistan, namely Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan, North West Frontier Province and the northern areas.

Composed of six chapters, the book is divided into two distinctive parts. While the first three chapters are for general readers, the three others, relying on statistical analysis, are directed at a more expert readership.

The most valuable input of this book is probably contained in its second chapter which provides a qualitative and comparative analysis of government schools, private schools and NGO schools. This is the central theme of the book. From the finding of the surveys it appears that there has been over the last decade a massive exodus from government to non-government schools, that is, from an inadequate government school system to an ever expanding private and NGO school network.

In the following chapter, the author looks into another major aspect of the reforms in the education sector, namely, participatory development programmes, incidentally part of the social action plan implemented in two phases in the 1990's. In this context, the question that obviously begs to be asked is how parents, despite illiteracy and low education levels, can play a monitoring role in their children's schooling. As in India—and elsewhere in the world for that matter—policy makers in Pakistan are convinced that parental and community participation was a missing ingredient in making rural public schooling a success. However, in this regard, no concrete results seem to have been achieved beyond the formation of government commissions. That may sound familiar to those who know the Indian scenario.

The author also demonstrates through this comparative study how the concentration of economic and political power (in a country the society of which has remained extremely conservative, if not feudal, in its rural areas) has fed inequalities. He successfully brings out the correlation between land-based power and schooling. Big landlords have—not surprisingly—had an adverse impact on village educational achievements, either because of the subversion of school infrastructures or simply by maintaining peasant children in the status of labourers. This is no new discovery but the figures of the surveys definitively confirm this social status quo.

The book is informative also for those whose knowledge of the subject is poor. There are nuggets here for everyone. Examples abound and the differences with India are worth noting. It is significant, for example, that in view of the lack of public sector basic education, the recent Pakistan administrations have actually welcomed the rapid growth of NGO schooling. Also that, according to the government of Pakistan Education Sector Reform Strategic Plan (2001-2004), the private sector was to be subsidized.

The book also notes that there is a flip side. For obviously, this shows that the state is abdicating its constitutional responsibility of providing quality public education particularly for the poor. What appears to be a pragmatic approach to the problem of inadequate provision and poor quality of schooling can have a long lasting negative impact on the country's educational system. One can but agree with the author when he suggests that subsidies should rather be used to ensure quality public sector education since it represents the benchmark for the non-government sector.

Trick-mirror reflections of the Indian situation abound. For instance, in April 2006, General Pervez Musharraf has addressed the issue expressing his serious concerns over what has been termed the poor performance of social sectors despite considerable expenditure in these areas. He has in this context asked for the revival of the cabinet committee on social sectors to look into specific issues of which basic education stands out as a priority.

However, in its journey towards the goal of universal and free basic education, the individual performance of Pakistan certainly appears, in the light of development studies expert Shahrukh Rafi Khan's analysis, far poorer than that of its Indian neighbour (also struggling to achieve the same goal as part of the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs)).

Figures can sometimes speak for themselves. The situation of primary education in Pakistan is abysmal. Pakistan's net primary enrolment amounts to 66% and is therefore lower than both the average level of 79% for the whole of South Asia and of 74% for low income countries. Flaws in the education system are numerous. They are in particular reflected by persistent gender gaps (an observation that clubs Pakistan together with Bangladesh and Afghanistan). Expenditure in education has also been gradually declining from 2.6% of the GDP in 1990 to 1.8% in 1999-01 and 1.7% in 2002-2003.

The rather grim situation pictured in Shah Rukh Rafi Khan's study does lead us to the conclusion that the allocation of resources alone does not provide the remedies. The greater challenge, as always, is to effectively implement policy.

In this context, we may recall that recent initiatives such as the government's devolution programme have been welcomed by most donors. This could lead to an improvement of provincial public resources management capacity and establishing decentralized financing but this again may not suffice to rectify the imbalances.

All in all, the solution would appear to depend on a change of mindsets as much as on a change of planning or improved management. This core issue is unfortunately not dealt with deeply enough in the book under review.

There are obviously strong cultural disparities between the regions covered in the study (the Northern Areas have their specificities which explain acute gender gaps) and these would have made interesting terrains of enquiry. This book is therefore a welcome opening to further investigation.■

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Muslim Institutions of Knowledge

Malini Sood

BASTIONS OF THE BELIEVERS: MADRASAS AND ISLAMIC EDUCATION IN INDIA
By Yoginder Sikand
Penguin Books India, 2005, pp.358, Rs. 395.00

ISLAMIC EDUCATION, DIVERSITY, AND NATIONAL IDENTITY: DINII MADARIS IN INDIA POST 9/11
Edited by Jan-Peter Hartung and Helmut Reifeld
Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2006, pp.331, Rs. 380.00

REMAPPING KNOWLEDGE: THE MAKING OF SOUTH ASIAN STUDIES IN INDIA, EUROPE AND AMERICA (19TH – 20TH CENTURIES)
Edited by Jackie Assayag and Véronique Bénéï
Three Essays Collective, Gurgaon, 2005, pp.135, Rs. 400.00

Following the events of 11 September 2001, the USA and other western countries identified madrasa education in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia as incubators of Islamic radicalism, militancy, and terrorism. This followed from the fact that the Afghan Taliban are a product of a particular offshoot of Deobandi Muslim scholarship, which emerged in Pakistan in the 1980s during the struggle against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Hence the causal chain leading from Deoband to the Taliban to al Qa'ida to 9/11.

In India, as in the rest of the world, 9/11 revived older anti-Islamic sentiments, with certain sections of the media and the political establishment leading an 'organized project of Islamophobia'. The vilification of madrasas was led by Hindutva groups, large sections of the Indian press, and certain officials. They portrayed these institutions as perpetuating Muslim backwardness and separatism, as dens of obscurantism, as breeding grounds of militancy if not terrorism, as obstacles to Muslim integration into the national mainstream, as anti-national agents of pan-Islamism. Even though none of those involved in the 9/11 attacks had attended a traditional madrasa or was a qualified 'alim (singular of ulama), the madrasa at Deoband (a small town in Uttar Pradesh) was identified as the supposed epicentre of a global Islamic terrorist conspiracy.

The representation of Islam and Muslims in academic and popular discourse in India is based on a lack of accurate information regarding the diversity and activities of Muslim alternative systems of education in the country, argue the first two books under review here. They seek to address the problem of Islamophobia and religious extremism by fostering a multi-faith dialogue and by dispelling essentialized images of Islam and Muslims.

Although about 40 per cent of the world's Muslims live in the Indian subcontinent, the field of South Asian Muslim studies has been neglected. Yoginder Sikand's study on the transformation of the madrasa system in postcolonial and contemporary India attempts to bridge this gap. His accessible book aimed at the general reader offers perspectives from history, sociology, political science, and Islamic studies, supplemented with empirical field-based research and secondary sources. In an attempt to understand the inner world of madrasas and the ulama's self-image, Sikand interviewed parents, madrasa students, ulama, scholars, activists, and critics in various madrasas in different parts of India. He encountered ulama representing a range of opinions and attitudes. Some proved to be defensive, self-righteous, and narrow-minded, displaying a 'juristic and literalist understanding' of Islamic law to the neglect of its spirit. Others were engaged in making a valuable contribution to maintaining Muslim identity and to preserving Islamic learning at a time when these are under threat from the growing influence of Hindu nationalist forces.

While madrasas (or dini madaris) play an important role in promoting literacy and social reform, especially among poor Muslim families, it is important not to exaggerate their influence on Muslim society. Even though madrasas exist in the thousands, their numbers are not particularly impressive given that Muslims in India number in the millions. The number of Muslims studying in madrasas is much smaller than those enrolled in regular schools and colleges. Parents send their children to madrasas for reasons that are other than purely religious, such as poverty and social discrimination, and for other pragmatic considerations. Indeed, poorly educated ulama are sometimes regarded with distrust and scorn as ignorant troublemakers.

Sikand emphasizes the enormous diversity within the madrasa system, including the conflicting and opposing political beliefs of the ulama of different institutions regarding theology, jurisprudence, and wider social and political goals.

Discussing the evolution of the concept of 'ilm or knowledge in the Islamic tradition as well as the development of the concept of the shari'ah over the centuries, he writes, 'In fact, no madrasa can be said to be completely 'traditional' in the true sense of the word, since the tradition of Islamic education . . . is itself a historical construct and in the process of constant development and elaboration. Nor can one speak of a 'typical' madrasa, given the immense diversity within the madrasa system . . .' Hence, he argues, that 'if much of what the 'ulama regard as the received Islamic tradition is actually a historical construct, there are no insurmountable theological barriers to madrasa reform.'

Amplifying and elaborating one of the main themes of Sikand's study—the need to counter conventional wisdom regarding madrasas as static, unchanging, monolithic, and homogeneous institutions, particularly in post 9/11 India—is the volume edited by Jan-Peter Hartung and Helmut Reifeld. This volume emerged from a conference entitled 'Madrasa Education in India: Islamic Education, Diversity, and National Identity post-9/11', held at the Neemrana Fort Palace, Rajasthan in November-December 2003, under the aegis of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, Germany, as part of a worldwide series of conferences, workshops, and seminars under a programme called 'Dialogue with Islam'. The conference had two aims: first, to address the gap in international interest in Islam in South Asia, which lags behind interest in Islam in other parts of the world; and second, to address contemporary international concern about madrasa education that focuses on its alleged fundamentalist influence on Muslims.

Like Sikand, the contributors to the volume seek to foster a broader and more comprehensive understanding of Muslim religious educational institutions, the dini madaris, which go beyond merely academic exercises and platitudes about goodwill, tolerance, and respect.

The two studies offer hope of reform of dini madaris from within in post-9/11 India, stressing their great regional variation and internal diversity, and refuting allegations against madrasas as breeding grounds of Islamic militancy. Both stress that militancy is not inherent in the madrasa system as such, and point out that there is no substantial evidence to suggest that Indian madrasas have been actively engaged in any form of militant activity.

Jan-Peter Hartung argues in his introduction that 'public allegations against *dini madaris* of being hotbeds of terrorism and, related to this, the demand for their fundamental reform, is strongly linked to the lack of state control over religious education as well as to those cases where Muslims constitute a religious minority.'

The first part of the volume offers historical perspectives on the evolution of the madrasa as an institution in India. Saiyid Naqi Husain Jafri examines madrasa education in the late Mughal period, including the services provided by madaris to the state administration and in meeting the personal demands of the monarch. Farhat Hasan investigates the clash between the traditional religious education imparted in madrasas and the 'secular' education imparted in the alternative educational system geared to serve the needs of the colonial state. Saiyid Zaheer Husain Jafri describes how the khanaqah, the most widespread Muslim religious educational institution in India, was challenged by the colonial administration as well as by the so-called reformist educational

movements in the second half of the nineteenth century; the focus is the Sufi hospice-cum-madrasa in Salon in present-day Uttar Pradesh, involving the Ahl-i hadith (known for their complete rejection of Sufism) and the Deobandis (who advocated only a certain kind of Sufism). In the only contribution on the Shi'as in this volume, Syed Najmul Raza Rizvi looks at the Shi'ite madrasa system in Awadh, one of the most important centres of Shi'ite scholarship in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as well as current developments in the madrasa system of the Shi'as in Lucknow.

The second part provides regional perspectives on madrasa education in India. Jan-Peter Hartung examines the connections between Indian and Middle Eastern systems of madrasa education. He focuses on the Natwat al-'ulama', the National Council of (Sunni) Muslim Religious Scholars, founded in the late nineteenth century, which played an important role in transnationalizing contemporary Indian Muslim scholarship. Paul Jackson, S.J. looks at current developments in madrasa education in Bihar, including the role of Sufi hospices, and describes attempts by Indian Jesuit students to engage in a dialogue with students and staff of dini madaris with the aim of fostering mutual understanding. Arshad Alam investigates the ways in which a Deobandi madrasa in Bodh Gaya, Bihar successfully competed with other masaliks in the area. Torsten Tschacher points to the different ways in which madrasa education developed in southern India as compared to the north. The dini madaris in Kilakkarai, Tamil Nadu, have adapted to changing circumstances while retaining their religious identity and education, thus following a middle way, which is often absent in northern India.

The third part deals with current developments based on recent fieldwork. Patricia Jeffery, Roger Jeffery, and Craig Jeffrey look at girls' education in the madrasas of Bijnor, Uttar Pradesh, and challenge the widespread notion that madrasa education essentially promotes an intolerant and masculinist idea of Islam. Mareike Jule Winkelmann, who examines allegations against dini madaris in the Indian media after 9/11, and Muslim reactions to this discourse, finds that there is no necessary causal relationship between a certain maslak and its rejection or acceptance of new approaches to madrasa education. Similarly, the general perception of Deobandi scholarship as a homogeneous body of knowledge is misplaced, argues Yoginder Sikand. Even within this maslak, which has been at the centre of the post-9/11 allegations, internal debates on the need for madrasa reform within a given framework have taken place.

Indeed, there is no inherent opposition on the part of the ulama to the inclusion of modern disciplines in the curricula of dini madaris as long as they do not conflict with the basic tenets of Islamic beliefs, reports Syed Abul Hashim Rizvi, director of the Centre for Promotion of Science, Aligarh Muslim University

Madrasas and dini madaris have played an essential role over the centuries as centres for the preservation and transmission of knowledge—that is, knowledge considered holistically since Islam does not make a distinction between 'religious' knowledge and 'secular' knowledge as in the West—and as loci for the circulation and exchange of scholarship in the Islamic world.

A different kind of remapping and classification of knowledge is seen in the invention of the fields of area studies and South Asian studies in the universities of India, Europe, and the United States in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The three essays in the volume edited by Jackie Assayag and Véronique Bénéï examine, broadly, the international circulation and exchange of people and knowledge, and the interaction of these processes of integration (and disintegration) with the phenomena of globalization, migration, and modernity.

Jackie Assayag's essay 'South Asia, "Made in the USA": Cultural Transfers, Universities and the Intellectual Diaspora' argues that the 'political recomposition of the contemporary world entailed a reconfiguration of knowledge.' Between 1850 and 1914, Europe was the centre of academic research and study. Since 1945, the United States has emerged as the cultural centre of research. 'Between 1850 and 1950, the non-Western "rest" of the world was only an "object" of study and "subject" of development; in short, its pre-modernity to be made intelligible or to be civilized. Today, the intellectual production of former colonized peoples, including those living in the diaspora, can no longer be disregarded,' writes Assayag.

English missionaries, American philosophers, and German philologists played a key role in the organization of the knowledge system on South Asia in the universities of Europe and the United States in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Assayag focuses on the role of W. Norman Brown, a notable American Sanskritist, in establishing South Asian Studies in the United States in the post-war period. The research policy, financing priorities, and geopolitical interests of the U.S. government, particularly Title VI and Public Law 480, had a profound influence in determining the aims and objectives of the emerging field of area studies on South Asia. Discussing the globalizing of the social sciences and the academy in the second half of the twentieth century, Assayag writes, 'Area studies institutions in the US began with the official intention of furthering US power in each world area. Today, it [sic] has moved toward the expansion of world academic networks with the arrival in the US of scholars from every part of the world now form the cutting edge of area studies. In the meantime, many American scholars travel, live, and study abroad, themselves experiencing what it feels to be at home in the diaspora.'

Véronique Bénéï elaborates on these themes in her essay 'Nations, Diaspora and Area Studies: South Asia, from Great Britain to the United States'. South Asian area studies and the related 'national traditions' of British and American area studies emerged 'in relation to the defence and protection of the nation'. Bénéï writes, 'Thus, at the height of its imperialist ascent in the world, the United States was the first to create these university departments in an attempt to combat diverse "threats" . . . According to quite another logic, it was also a surge in national consciousness which favoured the lasting formation of this type of studies in Great Britain, although it never attained to a comparable level there.' She also explores the emergence of Oriental Studies in relation to British colonialism, emphasizing that while nationalist concerns were a determining factor in the constitution of area studies, both in the UK and in the US, it is important to remember that 'Great Britain was at the time not only a nation but also an empire'. South Asian Studies in the United States has gained greater visibility thanks to the 'search for roots' on the part of second-generation South Asian American students, whose demands should be seen in the context of American multiculturalism and identity politics. More recently, the relation between the Hindu Indian diaspora and Hindu fundamentalism has been shaping the direction of South Asian Studies in the United States.

Jacques Pouchepadass's essay '"Subaltern Studies" as Postcolonial Critique of Modernity' is a useful summary of the theoretical and methodological debates generated by this school among not only South Asianists in India and abroad but also its influence among scholars in other regions of the South, notably in Latin America. Pouchepadass argues that the emergence of this intellectual current in the Indian context is not accidental. He writes, 'Of all the countries of the formerly colonized world, India is certainly the one which has the oldest and most numerous Western-type universities, where the historical discourse of modernity, capitalism and democracy and its postmodernist critiques have been most preciously received by the indigenous intelligentsia , and where the connections with Western academic circles are closest and most diversified. Indian intellectuals, as a result, were particularly well placed to operate this kind of critical return upon present-day doeminant metropolitan discourses.'

The organization and systematization of knowledge, its remapping and reconfiguration—whether on theological and religious lines, or on the basis of Orientalist learning and area studies, or along postcolonial and postmodernist lines—will always respond to the changing needs of a world constantly in flux. Of this we can be assured, whether we are in the academy or in the madrasa.■

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Resistance and *Rasa* in Pakistan

Girish Karnad

A CRITICAL STAGE: THE ROLE OF SECULAR ALTERNATIVE THEATRE IN PAKISTAN
By Fawzia Afzal-Khan
Seagull Books, Calcutta , 2005, pp. x+143, Rs. 425 .00

Although the subtitle of the book places its subject squarely within Pakistan, I should like to start with two events, separated by nearly two decades, which took place in India.

In 1989, the Sangeet Natak Akademi organized a theatre festival in New Delhi to celebrate Nehru's Birth Centenary. The uniqueness of the event lay in the fact that it was designed as a 'Retrospective' of Post-Independence theatre: personalities whom the Akademi had identified as builders of modern Indian theatre –most of whom were alive at that time—were invited to revive (where necessary) and present their most favourite or influential creation. The participants ranged from Utpal Dutt and Habib Tanveer to the young Ratan Thiyam.

I was then the Chairman of the Akademi and half-way through the festival a bright young couple, Madeeha Gauhar and Shahid Nadeem, came to meet me. Political relations between India and Pakistan were pretty fraught at the time, so I was surprised to discover they were Pakistanis who had come all the way from Lahore to witness the entire festival. I can't remember the exact words Madeeha used to express her elation at being able to see the landmark productions but I can vividly remember the glow on her face. That was also when I first heard of Ajoka, the radical theatre group the couple had founded in Lahore.

The second event took place only a few months ago, on 27 November 2005 to be precise. A Pakistani group called Tehrik-i-Niswan from Karachi, led by the theatre person and dancer, Sheema Kirmani, was in Lucknow at the invitation of an Indian NGO called the Women's Initiative for Peace in South Asia (WIPSA). The group was to present a play directed by an Indian director, Prasanna Ramaswamy, at a series of events organized across the country by the WIPSA, called 'Staging Peace' with the subtitle (that soon developed ironic undertones), 'A Dialogue in Theatre: Women's Endeavour to Create a Culture of Peace'.

Things took a nasty turn when the Tehrik-e-Niswan bowed to a request from the Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace, which was also meeting in Lucknow at that time, to present a short excerpt from their play. The officials of the WIPSA were displeased. They started off by accusing the Tehrik of breaching their contract by playing for another audience without their prior permission, but it soon transpired that deeper anxieties were at work. The play attacked American atrocities in My Lai and other places and the WIPSA was concerned lest this offend their funders, the Ford Foundation, India. They demanded that the content of the play be changed so as to make it less objectionable to the Americans. When the Tehrik rightly refused to oblige, they were threatened with the revocation of their 'visas' and alteration of their progrmame by changing the dates of their air tickets. Their hotel accommodation in Lucknow was cancelled and the group returned to Delhi only to find that they had even been turfed out of the guest house they were lodged in. They chose to return to Karachi. The Ford Foundation, caught in a glare they could have done without, declared censorship contrary to their policy of cultural sponsorship and demanded that the WIPSA apologize to the guests they had insulted. Several human rights groups and women's organizations have protested against this—to use the words of Praful Bidwai— 'repulsive episode'. It is significant that the demand for censorship came not from politicians or bureaucrats but from the NGO hosting the visit.

These two events in a way illustrate the passion for theatre that drives the 'Alternative' theatre in Pakistan, and the hazards it faces as well the courage it has to draw upon to stand by its often unpopular stances, even in a supposedly liberal society such as ours. And the two groups that figure in these incidents, Ajoka ('Dawn of a New Day' in Punjabi) and Tehrik-e-Niswan ('Movement for Women's Rights'), are major protagonists in the saga of the community theatre in Pakistan narrated by Fawzia Afzhal-Khan in this fascinating book.

Although the generation of leaders responsible for the creation of Pakistan was liberal and influenced by modern western notions , it wasn't too long before the state government started exhibiting 'ideological hostility to the performing arts'. Legislation inherited from the colonial masters, such as the Dramatic Acts Ordinance of 1857, began to be invoked to discourage new theatre groups. The problem was further exacerbated by considerations of language: Urdu, the national language, remained the language of the elite while the mother-tongues of the various regions remained undeveloped till recently.

The position of women became particularly problematic in the new context. There was an unwritten code, going back to the court of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah of Lucknow—a pioneer not merely of Urdu theatre but of modern Indian theatre itself— ' prohibiting Muslim women of "respectable" status from participating in song and dance.' (I am quoting Afzal-Khan here but this was equally true of Hindu society till a bare half century ago. One has only to remember that it was only in the mid-1930's that the first Brahmin woman, Pottammal, dared to sing in public in Madras to realize how grateful one should be to the extremely liberal attitude of the Congress Party , under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, towards women's participation in the public sphere.)

The situation became particularly horrendous with the coming to power of General Zia-ul-Haque, the military dictator from 1975 to 1988, who handed over virtually all jurisdiction in cultural and educational matters to the mullahs—'a vilified class prior to the 1970s and 80s, but since Zia's time, an increasing power to contend with'. In 1983, an Islamic Shari'a code of law was instituted 'as a parallel system to the existing code', severely downgrading the position of women and religious minorities.

A 'commercial' theatre –condemned by many for its vulgarity and double entendres—continued to flourish in Lahore. But the Islamicist ideologues were never comfortable with theatre and Afzhal-Khan spells out the reasons this distaste. First, theatre has this potential to raise embarrassing questions, to rouse its audience at least to *thinking* about problems. Then there is the all too easy association of performing arts with ' Hindu' culture. And worst of all, performance foregrounds the body—and could entail the 'exposure' of the female body. 'According to strict Quranic interpretation, men and women should observe modesty and …women, of course, should be veiled. Thus, what we saw as a princely custom for screening of elite women belonging to the ruling patriarch, has today become an obsession with *all* female bodies that ironically demands their negation in the public arena—and what arena could be more public than that of performance?'

It was no coincidence then that 1983 also proved the year when the parallel theatre made its appearance in Pakistan. Ajoka was started in Lahore by Gauhar who had been beaten up and jailed by the police for protesting the new laws. Parallelly, Kirmani who had continued to dance on stage throughout Zia's regime facing the displeasure of the military-clerical junta, founded Tehrik-i-Niswan in Karachi. Thus from its inception the alternative theatre movement grew hand-in-hand with the movement for women's rights and, drawing upon the Sufi legacy, has aspired to develop into an instrument of resistance against the repression unleashed against other defenceless groups like religious minorities and industrial and agricultural workers by the state. One need hardly

Whatever the received theory a group starts with, the actual problems of production, organization, presentation and interaction with its own specific audience shape its operative philosophy . The continual appeal to international theoritical models—perhaps an academic inheritance—to judge or characterize a show gives the book a needless ambience of intellectual condescension.

add that the struggle continues even today although apparently General Musharraf occasionally attends Ajoka productions and has even decorated Gauhar with a Sitara-i-Imtiaz. The fight has been courageous, relentless and on several fronts, forcing the groups to present their work in various venues –from proscenium stages to street corners and backyards—and to deal with a range of topics deemed inflammatory.

For instance, Ajoka's *Dukhini* , written by Nadeem and directed by Gauhar, deals with the Bangla Deshi women 'sold' off by their families into prostitution in Pakistan under the guise of marriage. Their *Aik Thee Nani*, on the other hand, is a much more charming piece dealing with the lives of two sisters, both performing artists. One has chosen to stow away her art in the suffocating atmosphere of Pakistan while the other has been able to develop hers in India. (The play has the sisters, Zohra Sehgal and Uzra Butt—once the stars of Prithvi Theatres—in the lead roles and has proved a major success on both sides of the border.)

While exploiting the potential of the theatre to create political awareness at the grassroots, Ajoka and Tehrik-i-Niswan have nevertheless insisted on shaping their plays as aesthetic projects . This has led some members to rebel and break away, insisting on a more fluid approach to form and on a more actively revolutionary agenda. Splintering from Ajoka, Lok Rehas of Punjab, for instance, chose to focus entirely on Punjabi language and audiences and explored problems of purely Punjabi identity.

Afzhal-Khan not only details the public history of these groups but brings out the more human dimensions of their project by lending a respectful ear even to the gossip and backbiting endemic to theatre groups everywhere and by delving into the internal bickerings that infest them. Both Gauhar and Kirmani are from the urban middle class, educated in convent schools, which predictably has helped create its own resentments and complaints. The author, also from the same background, is aware of the further ambiguities introduced by her position in the American academia. Her anxieties of being a 'native informant' haunts this book but also enriches it. For she is able to place the social and political issues dealt with by this theatre in the larger context of global economic and political forces that shape them from far. Her analysis of the layers of meanings that gather around a woman's body in the ever widening circles of social, cultural and political crises is particularly moving.

I have only one complaint. It is true that all of us in theatre have, at one time or another, been exposed to Brecht or Boals or Laura Mulvey. But surely there is no need to examine every effort made by a local group against these international—and to that extent globalized—theories. Whatever the received theory a group starts with, the actual problems of production, organization, presentation and interaction with its own specific audience shape its operative philosophy . The continual appeal to international theoritical models—perhaps an academic inheritance—to judge or characterize a show gives the book a needless ambience of intellectual condescension.

That said, one can only congratulate Afzal-Khan and her publishers, Seagull Books, on an illuminating, passionate and moving treatment of a subject that could have been so easily trivialized.■

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Reliving Moments that Mattered

Alpana Kishore

PARTITION DIALOGUES: MEMORIES OF A LOST HOME
By Alok Bhalla
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 240, Rs. 395.00

There are a few things that Alok Bhalla wants to prove in this collection of dialogues with Partition authors Indian and Pakistani. He asserts that undivided India had a vibrant composite culture where communities intermingled freely. It was destroyed by the entry of religious politics. Though tensions did exist, no one could dream that violence would reach the level of genocide. Zamindars and the Muslim bureaucrats were the main supporters of Partition, the ordinary man mostly a victim of events that spun out of control. With a few minor variations this is the standard liberal Indian take on Partition. And most importantly, it differs from its ideological counterpart across the border by its assertion that religious politics of intent and the historical circumstance of colonial rule and departure created the cracks that led to Partition—that there was never a sense that it was 'inevitable' – a frequently repeated Pakistani assertion.

Interestingly the authors who mostly differ with this notion of 'inevitability' include a Pakistani — Intizar Husain and an Indian — Kamleshwar – both from UP, the focal point of the demand for Pakistan. Those who mostly agree instead, are Punjabi Hindus who fled from West Punjab to India – Bhisham Sahni, Krishna Sobti and Krishna Baldev Vaid – the last to an unnaturally pessimistic level. Interesting, because conventional wisdom holds that the Punjab never asked for Partition and had the most shared existence of communities in which religion and caste were not too important.

Yet the Punjabi authors assert, Partition *had* to happen. Of course even here, there is a difference from the Pakistani notion of 'inevitability'. The Pakistanis go back to Mohammed bin Qasim to maintain that Muslims were always a separate race and the 98 percent Hindu converts who make up the community also magically joined their ranks the moment they converted. Therefore a clash of civilizations was bound to be. The Punjabi authors here go back only to the political developments of the early 20th century that created the cracks that would widen later.

Definite clues to the coming of 1947? Krishna Sobti emphasizes separate electorates and the greed of the Punjabi peasantry that eyed their landlord's lands and their potential freedom from debt. Bhisham Sahni remembers revivalist movements like the Arya Samajis (his grandfather was an active one) and the Muslim League that encouraged people to see themselves as distinct and superior and reservations that would make Hindus try harder for the same seat. Vaid stresses the dietary restrictions of the Hindus that "hurt' the Muslims and Sobti, a rising, new Muslim consciousness consolidated by Iqbal that "changed the old ways of relating to each other" so fast that as Bhisham Sahni claims, "friends and family came second." More likely as Sobti explains, it had to do with power. "Now that there is talk of granting women 30% reservation in various spheres, their status at home is bound to change. Don't you think I'll assert myself if I know I will always get a job? (*laughs*) The same thing happened with Hindus and Muslims."

UP on the other hand – conventionally and factually, the heartland of Muslim separatism — was the place that didn't see much violence, where people seemed to have paradoxically, a greater religiosity and a deeper understanding of each other and where Leaguers and orthodox Hindus could easily be friends – almost till the very end. And yes, dietary restrictions were in place but nobody seemed hurt – there was a take-in-

stride attitude to different ways of living — centuries old and part of everyday life.

This is at the heart of what Bhalla tries to put forward – a notion supported by every one of the authors he talks to – even the Punjabi ones who see early signs of separation and anger. Sobti calls this shared way of life "a workable harmony" and adds, "'Secular' is not a word I'd like to use for the way of life that existed before the Partition. The weave of that common culture was so strong and dense that it still lingers, not as a memory but as a source of strength….Each respected the other's 'otherness'." Sahni credits this to the liberal thought of the medieval times because of which, "differences in faith, customs, eating habits were taken for granted."

Therefore clearly Partition could hardly be 'inevitable' – at least not in the way Pakistani historians put forward. Intizar Husain's stories string together the lore of Ram and Krishna with Imam Hussein, "I am a Shia Muslim," he says, "who thinks there is a Hindu sitting inside me because I was born in this land." He tells Bhalla he can recall collecting the *diyas* off his parapet adjoining his neighbour's on Diwali. Kamleshwar says and remembers the opposite – "There is a questioner called Mehmood who resides within Kamleshwar." He adds, "When *tazias* went through our neighbourhood, Hindu women would carry their children under them for blessings and gather their *makhanas* showered over the *tazias* to take home as *prasad*."

Bhalla's conversations also document the minutiae of the time when the changes started happening and the silences began. Kamleshwar's friend Ahmed, walks past without greeting him, he later learns, on the instructions of the local mosque. The Muslim roadside repairer of punctured tyres takes down posters of suddenly 'Hindu' actresses Kanan Bala and Devika Rani. Bhisham Sahni loses his friend Altaf to the local League unit. Sobti recalls that Hindus and Muslims stopped buying from each other's shops after 1945. Indeed, Bhalla's dialogues travel far beyond the literary milieu in their depth of exploration.

The only irritant is the professor's own conversational technique that sometimes overpowers his authors instead of letting their words come through naturally and giving the reader space to absorb them. Bhalla is a man of strong opinions on everything from Gandhi and centre state dealings to man-woman relations and he makes sure we get to hear them. This is especially glaring in a non-conversation — his lengthy introduction where he seems, at times, almost to take the Partition personally (perhaps as every Indian should???) and presents the migratory experience in Partition literature as overwhelmingly negative.

There is no doubt that the *mohajir* experience has been bitter in hindsight and perhaps it is represented as such by the writers who experienced it then. Post-1971 the issues of nationality, home and identity became even clearer. But surely, this can only be one side of the picture in real life. Migration continued well into the sixties and Muslims left in droves for Pakistan in those early years to make better lives – and they usually did – at least materially. Ask the small time lawyer from Faizabad or the local magistrate from Bahraich – or at least, ask their grandchildren living comfortably in Karachi's Defence today, how fast they rose once they migrated when a new economy had to be created and jobs filled. Ask also their relatives who stayed behind in old crumbling homes where time must have seemed to stand still, how their lives progressed in those early years. Perhaps one came to acquire an inner peace with his decision and the other didn't. But then again, one quickly acquired three cars in his driveway, the other maybe, not even one.

The bothersome assertiveness is therefore unnecessary since the notions he suggests speak so flawlessly for themselves through his conversations. In fact his dialogue with Intizar Husain is a masterly probing of the writer's early ambiguities – and he achieves a feat in getting Husain, an equally masterly evader who can run rings around interviewers, to give reasonably direct answers to uncomfortable questions. This book is a treasure trove of ideas, memories and the clarity of hindsight. It presents a decisive moment in time through people who lived through it. It proves that Partition meant so many different things to different people—yet tells us inheritors of its legacy how, in the end, they could all define it only in terms of loss.■

Alpana Kishore has reported extensively on Jammu & Kashmir and Pakistan and is working on a Partition project on post-1947 Muslim choices to stay or go in the absence of violence. Currently she is a *Scholar of Peace* fellow with WISCOMP for a project on the effects of armed conflict on Kashmiri nationality and identity.

Narrativizing Partition: The Perils of Overkill

Tarun K. Saint

PARTITIONS (KITNE PAKISTAN)
By Kamleshwar. Translated from Hindi by Ameena K. Ansari.
Penguin, Delhi, 2006, pp. 368, Rs. 350.00

REPRESENTING PARTITION: HISTORY, VIOLENCE AND NARRATION
By Anup Beniwal
Shakti Book House, 2005, pp.208, Rs. 450.00

Kamleshwar's short story 'Kitne Pakistan' (tr. 'How Many Pakistans?') is a minor classic of partition literature. His Hindi novel of 2001, bearing the same title, has now been published in an eminently readable English translation, as *Partitions*. Translated competently by Ameena K. Ansari of the Department of English, Jamia Millia Islamia, the novel expands on some of the themes earlier explored in the story. The decision not to attempt a literal translation of the novel's title is apt, given the expanded timeframe of the novel, as a reflection on multiple partitions through history. The motif of cross-border romance, which becomes a metaphor for geopolitical desire, runs through the novel, as in the case of the story, as do images of dismemberment and dislocation. The novel is indeed ambitious in its scope. The unnamed adeeb or writer, who summons to the court of literature various figures from human history accused of practising the politics of hatred, casts his net far and wide. Characters from epics such as the *Gilgamesh* and the *Mahabharata*, as well as from the pages of history, such as Aurangzeb, Hitler, Mountbatten, and Jinnah appear in this court, and tell their stories. Various figures responsible for the creation of many 'Pakistans' in the past and present are cross-questioned by the eponymous writer figure. They are deemed to be accountable for their actions, which resulted in suffering for countless victims and refugees through history. Time and history appear in the court as personifications, expressing shame at the depravity that mankind has been capable of through the ages.

However, one may note that the risk of over-extension of metaphor was already present in the earlier story. If 'Pakistans' are indeed the result of an absence of mutual fellow feeling, leading to hatred, as the narrator of *Kitne Pakistan* believes, the 'partition-effect' may certainly continue to be manifested. However, a certain economy of affect held together the fragmentary episodes in the original story, marked by the refrain as lamentation, 'Kitne Pakistan'. Instead, in the novel, the attempt to achieve a metaphoric criticism of such gaps in communication between

individuals and communities, while reaching back into the realm of mythology and prehistory, leads to the idea of multiple partitions through time becoming somewhat repetitive. Furthermore, the poignancy of the poetic refrain in the story is lost here, as the commentator, rather than adeeb-writer, often comes to the fore to denounce excesses by culpable villains of history. This may partly be on account of the dilation and expansiveness of novelistic form, leading to a certain banality in the rendering of encounters between the protagonist and historical personalities. However, for this reader, the major difficulty was with respect to the question of devising a literary form through which testimony itself may be reinvented for a contemporary audience. After all, Manto in 'Khuda ki Kasam' and Intizar Husain in 'An Unwritten Epic' had earlier self-reflexively interrogated the limitations of the short story as a testamentary mode, while attempting to encompass the historical catastrophe of partition, and its afterlife.

The adeeb does pay tribute in the novel to many fellow writers, including Manto and Rahi Masoom Raza (whose novel *Adha Gaon* is quoted), even to the extent of having Joginder Paul and Krishna Sobti provide evidence in the writer's court. Such invocations, however, shift attention away from the problem of bearing witness to unrepresentable trauma, instead magnifying the importance of the writer's role. Rather than strive for recognition of the fragility of literary testimony as a mode of witnessing the witnesses, the narrative takes on a stagy quality, as these writer-figures intervene in the 'trial' underway. Furthermore, the sudden intrusion of stories of myriad victims of catastrophes, past and present, without sufficiently detailed description, risks contributing ultimately to a sense of indifference. The contention that there are forms of partition everywhere, and that such 'Pakistans' are equivalent to hatred, leads to a loss of specificity and texture in particular contexts invoked here, whether 1947, or Bosnia in the 1990s.

Perhaps the most moving sections of this novel appear in the form of a transgressive romance, partly set in Mauritius, between Vidya/Pari/Parveen (a woman who suffers violence to her person during the Partition, then converts to Islam and moves to Pakistan), and the adeeb. If this thread had been strengthened, the interweaving of the personal and historical motifs of 'partitions' might have been more effective, as is the case in Intizar Husain's novel *Basti*. Kamleshwar's interest in the inner lives of historical characters, as he says in a recent interview with Alok Bhalla (in *Partition Dialogues*, 2006), does lead to an exploration of several interesting by-lanes of the past. Although he does achieve an unconventional take on figures such Dara Shikoh and Aurangzeb, the format of courtroom exchanges becomes somewhat predictable towards the end. For example, at the conclusion, scientists such as Oppenheimer and Edward Teller (rather than Taylor, as in the English translation) are held accountable for the nuclear explosions at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The lack of detail with respect to these nuclear physicists, and important differences between them, takes away from the interest of such allusions to atrocities in the past. For instance, Teller, 'father' of the hydrogen bomb (who was one of the models for Dr Strangelove in Stanley Kubrick's film), eventually fell out with Oppenheimer, even testifying against him when his loyalty to the US was questioned. At this point in the narrative, personifying Hiroshima and Nagasaki as witnesses denouncing the evils of atomic science does not really amplify the sense of moral gravity underpinning the issue. Such passages in which effects of historical trauma are described rather than evoked, seem overwrought. Even so, the narrative redeems itself in its moving conclusion, in which Sant Kabir makes an impassioned plea to give up nuclear arsenals, and demilitarize our consciousness. Partitions thus prompts one to reflect once again on the question, who indeed will stand witness to the witnesses? A further self-consciousness as regards the activity of 'literary' witnessing might have helped this novel avoid the dangers of prolixity and metaphoric over-extension.

Representing Partition, a study of Partition fiction in Indian writing in English by Anup Beniwal, in contrast, is too narrow in scope, given the choice of approach and selection of texts by the author. Firstly, delimiting the field of inquiry to novels in English restricts the possibility of comparisons with novels in other languages, even if in translation, or for that matter, from Pakistan. While classics such as Bhisham Sahni's *Tamas* and Krishna Baldev Vaid's *Guzara Hua Zamana*, (translated as *The Broken Mirror)*, and other novels in Indian languages are left out, novels in English from Pakistan such as Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man* or Kamila Shamsie's *Salt and Saffron* find no mention. Even more of a surprise, novels that do fall within the terms of reference of this study, such as B. Rajan's *The Dark Dancer*, Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day*, and Shauna Singh Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers* do not feature. Beniwal discusses some of the usual suspects, such as Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*, Chaman Nahal's *Azadi*, Attia Hosain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, as well as other lesser-known novels about Partition. Furthermore, the author's demarcation of pre-Rushdie Partition fiction from post-Rushdie fiction is somewhat schematic. Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers* is certainly not an example of 'historiographic metafiction', which is perhaps why it was not included in the analysis. The argument becomes forced when the author takes up unlikely candidates such as Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* and Khushwant Singh's *Delhi* as examples of Partition fiction.

While in a brief review it would not be possible to discuss each of the individual chapters, some of Beniwal's critical insights are interesting. The author detects covert forms of identification with modes of consciousness that militate against 'secular nationalism' in *Train to Pakistan*, and observes that the language depicting intercourse between lovers, and that depicting rape, is often strikingly similar in some of these narratives about violence. The analysis is marred, however, by the tendency to florid prose. For example, "the experience of partition has been such that it provides a perennially potential platform to creatively play upon the possibilities and probabilities pregnant within the phenomenon" (p.1). Here some careful pruning by an in-house editor could perhaps have been useful.

Furthermore, it does seem at times that the rather flimsy range of novels Beniwal directs his critical artillery that proves to be an insufficiently challenging target. This is the critical equivalent of hunting rabbits with a buffalo gun. It would have been pertinent for the author to include some reference to novels that fall outside the 'secular nationalist' or 'liberal nationalist' frameworks in which he situates such partition fiction. Alok Bhalla termed such fiction 'communally charged'; such texts often carry the ideological baggage that is seemingly jettisoned by writing in English. Whether we agree with the positing of such a category of Partition fiction or not, not taking on board this mode of writing seems to leave this account incomplete. One hopes that the author will prise open the disciplinary boundaries that have restricted his approach, and look beyond Indian writing in English in his next study of Partition fiction.■

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Book News **Book News**

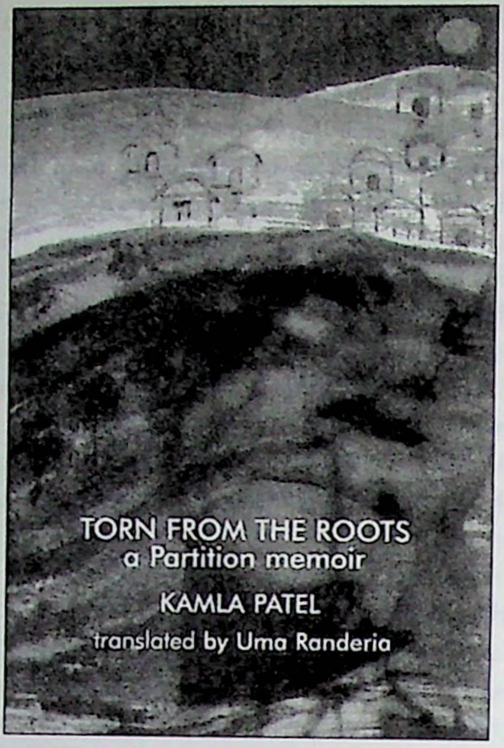
Fragrance Beyond Borders by Amarendra Narayan is a novel based on the theme of improving India-Pakistan relations.
Published by the author, 2005, pp. 202, 200 Bht.

Brideless in Wembley by Sanjay Suri is a spirited revelation of the exuberant mosaic of life in post-immigration Britain and outlines a people's search for an anchor in the alien land they have made their home.
Penguin/Viking, 2006, pp. 381, Rs. 495.00

Lived and Living Agonies

Alok Rai

TORN FROM THE ROOTS: A PARTITION MEMOIR
By Kamala Patel. Translated by Uma Randeria.
Women Unlimited, New Delhi, 2006, pp.236, Rs.350.00



Kamlaben Patel's Partition memoir, *Mool Sotan Ukhdelan*, the translator's note tells us, is considered as a neglected classic in Gujarati. How much more creditable it is, then, to redeem it from the neglect of its original location, and make it available in English translation — *Torn from the Roots*! Because, given the sheer tide of Partition things in which we are drowning, after the silence of half a century, it isn't easy for something to stand out. And yet, this modest memoir does.

I must confess that my first reaction on being asked to write about yet another Partition book was, well, acute ennui. I expected to encounter the recycling of the same old clichés, not just the hallowed (and dusty) images that have been collecting in the seams of the allegedly creative writing about the Partition—the trains piled with bodies, the dismembered limbs, the wells choked with the bodies of women whose men preferred the women's deaths to their own "dishonour"—but also the academic clichés about the nation-state and its necessary violence, or about secularism and its discontents. I dreading encountering the old witches—caste, class and gender—being pressed to yield up their familiar insights yet again, obscuring the specificity of what is being observed, and reducing all the diversity that passes before the glazed eye to the same universal, anti-universalist narrative.

In fact, the unique value of this memoir derives from the fact that the author is no intellectual, no ideologue, she has no axe to grind, no point to prove. I'm in no position to talk about the original, but the short, naïve sentences of the English translation capture brilliantly the particular quality of this memoir. The author—Kamlaben Patel—was a trusted lieutenant of the indomitable Mridula Sarabhai, and as such was intimately involved with the day-to-day work of the rehabilitation of "abducted women" in the aftermath of Partition. And the memoir tells of that work in a loose, unstructured fashion, rather like gossip, in which there is a beginning and an end, of course, but what comes in between those two points is random, casual, incidental. Rather in the manner of those desultory conversations that are jogged along by various forms of "that reminds me..." As a consequence, it renders faithfully the diversity of experiences that is subsumed under the false unity of the official phrase: "abducted women" There are the abducted women, of course, the brutalized spoils of war—but there is an entire range of other emotions playing through here, including, of course, love. There are women running away under the camouflage of violence, finessing a bizarrely private destiny in the midst of all the chaos. There are those for whom abduction is liberation and the dream of fulfillment, and others for whom "rehabilitation" is a return to the prison house of the lives from which they fled. And children, always the children...

But what is most interesting is the trajectory that the naïve author herself—idealistic and Gandhian, of course, but also not free from the prejudices of her caste and class—describes in her engagement with smudged, shattered lives, spilling across categories, undermining received frameworks of understanding. Thus, for instance, she confesses to being "aghast" that even Indian (Hindu) men could have raped the unfortunate women who had been entrusted to their protective custody. Reading the grim realities amidst which she is working, she is forced to admit that Punjabi Hindus were just as bad as Muslims in their attitude to women. What is significant here is the vulnerability to experience, the ability to remain open to the infinite surprise of living in a manner that mere intellectuals, armoured in critiques of naïve empiricism, should envy, but probably won't. It is a curiously moving spectacle — like learning. Even when she concludes, in the face of the horrific circumstances amidst which she is working, that there appears to be something inherently beastly about men, something fundamentally barbaric, what is moving is the fact that this "insight" -- right or wrong is beside the point — appears surprising even to herself. This is crucially different from the ideological certitude of the radical feminist because it is open to revision, open to being transformed by other, different, experiences. As, for instance, the acknowledgment that the "abduction" of women was a relatively insignificant phenomenon in the Eastern version of the barbarism of Partition.

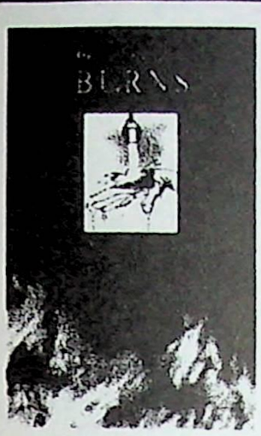
It follows from the sheer and admirable "naivete" of this memoir that the stories it recounts — briefly, without literary embellishment — are infinitely richer than the reruns one finds in what I suppose must be called Partition literature. The story of Ismat and Jitu, for instance, has so much more human drama in it than the loud chauvinist fantasy of *Gadar*. Ismat, all of fourteen, smuggling herself onto a Hindu refugee caravan, being improbably reunited with her eighteen-year old lover, Jitu, in Amritsar; and then being married to him, with the approval of Jitu's Hindu parents. The rest of the story is less heartwarming, alas. Ismat was returned, under the "abducted women" arrangements, to her parents... And, to be fair, the story *is* one of abduction, but it is uncertain who is being abducted, and who is doing the abducting. Jitu is last seen on a train years later, *en route* to Bombay to watch a cricket match, pale, tubercular, a middle-aged ghost of the young lover who died when his Ismat was abducted, really, by her parents—and by history, I suppose.

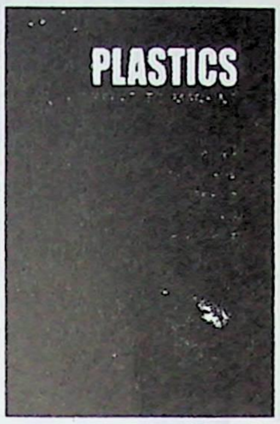
Many other stories here, of course—as there must be. But what is particularly tantalizing is the sense that these stories are in fact continuous with the lives that we are leading today. The people being talked about, the friends and family, must be around us, lugging their secret, hidden histories, coping—and failing to cope—with the myriad deformations of grief and guilt, leaking their radioactive poisons into the ambient society. But Kamlaben is scrupulously discreet, and no names are revealed. But if a scholar were to come up with a footnoted edition of this memoir, I for one would be unable to resist the temptation of dipping into it, for reasons that are not only, I believe, dishonourable.

Because the after-life of Partition in our society, acknowledged largely through a kind of willed amnesia, is in fact something that needs to be worked through, not suppressed. There are admittedly strong reasons why the call to forget and forgive is raised whenever the subject of Partition is sought to be raised except in the tired formulae indicated above, the punch-and-judy violence of certain remote beings in a remote time, with whom we have nothing whatever in common. And if you say it often enough, you might even believe it. And yet. All that negative emotion, that pain, that anger, will have to be confronted, the shame and the embarrassment taken on board. Other post-traumatic societies have resorted to the mechanism of the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions as a way, howsoever inadequate, of undertaking this process. Our own solution, curiously, appears to be *more* communalism, as a way of deferring thought about the infinite sorrow of Partition of course — but also as a way of proving, retrospectively, that communalism, now rendered analgesic, could not itself have been the cause of that sorrow, that grief, that pain.■

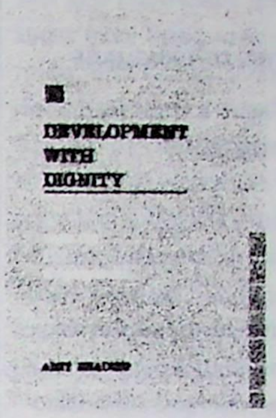
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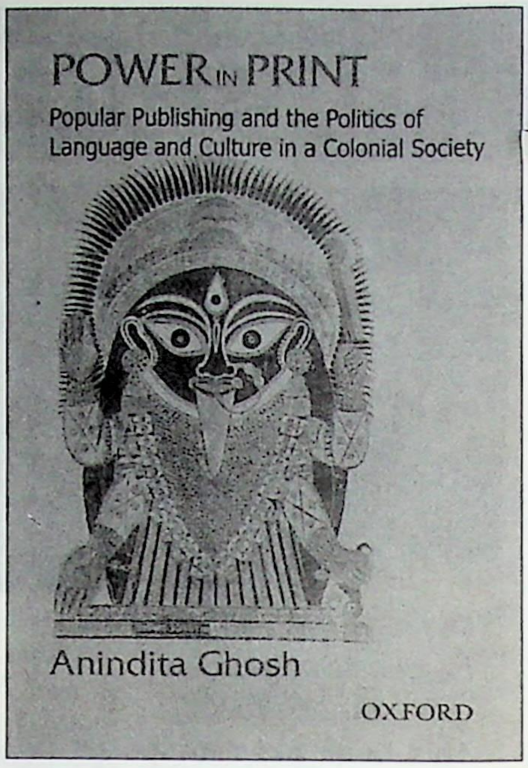
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Print Culture

Abhijit Gupta

POWER IN PRINT: POPULAR PUBLISHING AND THE POLITICS OF LANGUAGE AND CULTURE IN A COLONIAL SOCIETY
By Anindita Ghosh
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 348, Rs. 650.00



A growing number of studies in recent Indian historiography have paid close attention to the role played by print in shaping the contours of modern India. Earlier, the imprecise and unsatisfactory term 'print culture' was often invoked to stand in for a perspective in which print was employed as some kind of a wide-angle lens, whose panoptic sweep and scope often obscured—or even misrepresented—the smaller picture. However, the more focussed and calibrated perspective offered by the discipline of book history in recent years has acted as a kind of corrective to the grand narratives of print which still continue to enjoy some degree of scholarly sanction. By paying close attention to a wide, and often neglected, range of primary sources, it has been possible for scholars to retrieve histories that were thought to have passed beyond the reach of any archaeological tool.

In the monograph under review, Anindita Ghosh attempts to plot the uneven history of print in Bengal along the twin axes of language and literature. While acknowledging the importance of the colonizer-colonized framework, she also draws our attention to 'how in a competitive colonial environment, print-languages and literature afford opportunities to indigenous groups for consolidating power, along multiple axes of class, gender and community'. In her first chapter, 'The Social Profile of a Language' Ghosh pays close attention to the rise of Bengali—'the officially blessed language of early British India'. Drawing substantially on William Adams's reports on education in Bengal, Ghosh shows how the *pathshalas* or 'elementary indigenous Bengali vernacular schools' were drawing increasing numbers of lower-caste students who were being schooled in the arts of basic reading and writing, sometimes even breaking into poetry as was the case with the Vasihnavas. While the Brahmins predictably occupied the commanding heights of literary culture, Ghosh argues that access to the written word was by no means restricted to the higher castes and cites such examples of the oral tradition as *kathakata* and performances based on mangal kavya and the panchalis. While there is no doubt that oral narrative sessions and performances create their own interpretative communities, it is also true that the protocols of oral and written circuits of communication are vastly different. The 'imperious' nature of literacy—to quote Walter Ong—tends to overrule orality to the point where the written text becomes hegemonic with respect to the spoken word.

Ghosh is on firmer ground when she discusses the indigenous interface between the British and the Indian languages, particularly the intervention of Brahmin pundits. William Carey's Serampore Mission Press would not have been the institution it was had it not been for the vital contributions made by the *munshi* Ramram Basu and the blacksmith-turned-typographer Panchanan Karmamkar. One also recalls the testimony of the Protestant missionary Bartholomew Ziegenbalg about his sessions with a Brahmin pundit in Tranquebar in 1706. The British were however less generous about acknowledging the contributions of their Indian assistants. For example, it was not before 1839 that the Calcutta Baptist Missionaries would feel it necessary to record on the title-page of their Bengali Bible that the 'translation was made by the Calcutta Baptist Missionaries with native assistants'.

In chapter two, Ghosh continues her investigation of the 'standardization and Sansktritization' of the vernacular leading to a kind of false consciousness about respectability. William Carey is a key player in this, and in many ways anticipates James Long's purist zeal for purging Bengali literature of 'immorality' during the mid-century. The other key player in this is the Calcutta School Book Society, whose activities are described in detail. The coming about of what Ghosh calls 'polite Bengali' is a complex and often messy process but Ghosh handles this narrative with great skill. Citing a wide range of texts Ghosh is able to chart the twin trajectories of obscenity and gentility from the 1850s onwards. What is particularly interesting in her account is the way in which she draws our attention to the adversarial relationship between the culture of the educated *bhadralok* and that of the women's *antahpur*. The shared and communitarian character of the *antahpur* culture is dealt with in greater detail in chapter six—'Women Refusing Conformity'—in which Ghosh restores a measure of agency to women who produce as well as consume literature. This chapter is perhaps the most significant in the book and one wonders whether it should not have come higher in the batting order. Here, Ghosh looks at a variety of *meyeli* or womanly genres, both oral and written, such as *basar* or wedding songs or early excursions into print by the likes of Soroshibala Debi, Rasasundari Debi or Saralabala Sarkar. While many studies have complained—and rightly so—about the erasure and marginalization of the woman's voice in 19th century Bengal, it is also important to recognize the resilience of those authors and works which managed to evade what Ghosh calls 'the tutelage of male sponsors or benefactors'. One hopes that the whole story of the ways in which women's writing and reading created a new communications circuit within the *bhadralok* parameters will be related by Ghosh in the future.

Chapters five and seven follow a similar agenda as chapter six, and report on two genres traditionally consigned to the margins—social farces, and romances and fables based on Persian-Arabic models. Both chapters are solidly researched and retrieve a literary history which goes against the grain of high-caste *bhadralok* discourse. Ghosh begins her account of farces from the 1860s but one wonders whether she should not also consider the street poetry and sensational accounts of current events—by the likes of Maheshchandra Das De and Chandrakanta Sikdar, in the previous decade—as precursors of this genre. As Ghosh points out, a key feature of this genre seems to be its intimate relationship with topical events and scandals. It seems to me that such appropriation of the quotidian events of life in a big city gestured towards an

Communication

Rosinka Chaudhuri's informed review of the two books on early Indian poetry ("Of Bards and Bad Press", *The Book Review,* March 2006) was thoroughly enjoyable. However, I wish to point out that it is NOT Lokuge's anthology that makes Toru Dutt's Bianca, "accessible to readers for the first time". I know of at least one other recent edition of that text—published in 2001 by Prachi Prakashan (New Delhi, Bhubaneshwar) and edited by Subhendu Mund.

T. Vijay Kumar, Hyderabad

the more focussed and calibrated perspective offered by the discipline of book history in recent years has acted as a kind of corrective to the grand narratives of print which still continue to enjoy some degree of scholarly sanction. By paying close attention to a wide, and often neglected, range of primary sources, it has been possible for scholars to retrieve histories that were thought to have passed beyond the reach of any archaeological tool.

urban aesthetic whose full potential was however not realized until the 20th century. Ghosh also argues that Sumit Sarkar's identification of the 'upper-class literati' as the chief consumers of *Battala* literature is too narrow and that the performative aspect of many *Battala* productions made them accessible to even a non-literate audience. This may well be true but hard data about the composition of such audiences is thin on the ground. Readers or audiences rarely leave records of their book-reading or theatre-going practices and thus the historian of reading or viewing is often forced to work in a kind of material vacuum.

The chapter titled 'Bengali and its "Muslim Other"' is another one which contains the seeds of a longer work. This is an area which has not received sufficient attention from print historians but some of the most dramatic encounters between pre-print and print practices can be seen in what James Long called the 'Musalmani-Bangla' literary genre. Ghosh argues that the 'remarkable tenacity with which these works held on to pre-print modes of representation, orthography, and even script is astounding.' I would however disagree with Ghosh when she claims that the title-page also reinforces the same allegiance to the manuscript tradition. It seems to me that the paratextual excess of the title-pages of this genre indicates how notions of authority, proprietorship and entailment were being articulated at a time when the protocols of the book trade were still in a fluid state. For example, colophons and copyright notices become a regular feature of these title-pages after the passage of Act XX in 1847. Ghosh also cites instances of how many of these works were able to make the transition to the realm of oral transmission. At the same time, Ghosh alerts us to the fact that like its Hindu counterpart, the Muslim bourgeoisie also chose to marginalize this genre for 'its want of "Islamic values" and "respectability"'. Ghosh's highly nuanced readings of literary works belonging to this genre are one of the more rewarding portions of the book.

Finally, chapters three and four attempt an overview of the cheap book market and its readers. Here, I feel Ghosh could have restricted her scope somewhat since this is an area too vast to be compressed within the space of two chapters. The account of commercial publishing from 1857 onwards is too dependent on James Long and government reports. While it is true that nothing like printers' or publishers' archives exist from this period, some data about print runs are available from the prelims and catalogues of contemporary publications. Also, the copyright act which created awareness about intellectual property was not Act XXV of 1867, but Act XX of 1847, which was passed following representations by the Bengal British India Society. These quibbles apart, Ghosh's study is a significant addition to the growing corpus of scholarship on the coming of print in India and will be a vital reference point for future research in the field.■

Abhijit Gupta teaches English at Jadavpur University, Kolkata, and is co-editor of *Print Areas: Book History in India* series.

An Enigmatic Work

Amiya P. Sen

BANKIM CHANDRA CHATTERJI : ANANDAMATH OR THE SACRED BROTHERHOOD
Translated with an Introduction and Critical Apparatus by Julius J. Lipner
Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005, pp.281, price not mentioned.

The first time I heard about Professor Lipner's intentions of re-translating the *Anandamath* was at a symposium organized by The Book Review Literary Trust, New Delhi, sometime in March-April 2003. Both Professor Lipner and this reviewer had spoken on that occasion, albeit for different lengths of time and with unequal authority. Now whereas Lipner appears to have no memories of that occasion (he does not mention it in his Preface), some of us present at the time still vividly recall the eagerness and enthusiasm with which he approached the project. As I recall, this was a time when Gautam Chakravarti had just begun his translation of the *Kapalakundala*[1], another well known novel of Bankim, and the post-tea conversation, predictably enough, produced some animated discussion on the challenges before a translator and what a translation might potentially do to a text. Just how this symposium might have contributed to Lipner's project is difficult to assess but I am happy that his passion, patience and perseverance has now borne fruit. What we have before us, is, to use his own words, a *suhridic* (friendly, faithful) translation and a work that is equally authoritative in the areas of editing, annotation and critical commentary.

Indeed, as Lipner points out, the novel *Anandamath* (1882) with the song Vande (Bande) Mataram included, have been characterized variously as '...the most inspiring, threatening or challenging utterances in the history of India's birth as a nation' (p.3). It is also, in a good measure, an enigmatic work. It speaks, somewhat ambivalently, of both a burgeoning provincial (Bengali) nationalism as also the pan-Indian. It invokes the Mother in a manner that is uncommon if not unprecedented in the Hindu-brahmanical tradition and inserts cultural imaginings that were to produce both solidarity and schism among the Indian peoples. Finally, even its great popularity cannot obscure the fact that in terms of literary quality alone, it compares somewhat poorly with some of Bankim's other novels.[2] Criticism of this novel was to emerge from several quarters, most notably from the Bengali Muslim intelligentsia that resented the use of Hindu religious imagery and several 'unkind' references to the community of Muslims.[3] And even at a time when the novel was popular with this class, Bengali Hindus were quick to point to the somewhat contrived nature of the plot. "*Anandamath*.....shows a decline both in art and creation of character though it is intensely patriotic', observed the veteran journalist, Nagendranath Gupta, in 1901. Not surprisingly, the conservative Hindu press too took exception to Bankim's depicting Hindu renouncers [in the novel, *santans*] in the role of social workers and militant warriors. Of this, the Bengali literary critic, Panchkodi Bandopadhyay, was to write with considerable sarcasm: " In this novel we find the *santans* rob the Company's possessions, murder innocent sepoys and feed the starving. I have to say that our scriptures and our religion never sanctioned such bizarre ideals of social service and political work". Bandopadhyay also goes on to argue, not unjustifiably I think, that the all-renouncing yet domesticated *santans* bore closer resemblance to Protestant monks than Hindu *sanyasis* who were expected to sever all worldly and familial ties.

In hindsight it would also appear as though the political appeal of the

novel grew only at a certain historical juncture. The civilian Romesh Chandra Dutt for instance, has aptly observed how the battle-cry of 'Bande Mataram', was seldom, if ever, used in the 1870s and 1880s when the song itself was composed and made public through the novel. Dutt, incidentally, was also to claim that the 'evil notoriety' that the song acquired in the Swadeshi days was far from the intentions of its author for, if anything, the novel ends on a strong note of reconciliation and explicit acceptance of British rule. "That Bankim Chandra himself foresaw or devised any such use of it, is impossible to believe ", he wrote.

Bankim Chandra consistently denied *Anandamath* the status of a historical novel and admitted introducing deliberate changes in plot, character or locale over successive editions. Thus the district Birbhum where the *santans* are seen to repeatedly clash with the Company's forces was not the site where hordes of militant sanyasis and (Madari) fakirs were historically located in the 1770s and 1780s. In later editions significantly, *santan* vengeance is directed against Muslims, not the British which many have taken to be apologetic backtracking. Again, Bankim could not have been oblivious of the fact that by this time, Nawab Mir Jafar was dead and buried and yet it is his 'misgovernment', more than anything else that is seen to invite the wrath of the people. Naturally, the liberties that Bankim takes with historical details created a great deal of speculation about the possible geographical setting of the novel or the political inspiration thereof. In this work Lipner examines at length the more plausible theories such as that of B.B. Majumdar who believed *santan* rebelliousness to have been modelled upon the popular movements led by the Vasudeo Balwant Phadke in Maharashtra and that of Kishanchand Bhakat who located the uprisings in Lalgola (district Nadia, W.Bengal). My own understanding though is that beyond a point it is futile to historicize literary imagination and as the historian Amales Tripathi reminded us many years ago, the deliberate changes of venue, plot or character do not really impinge on Bankim's overarching intentions. Here I might as well confess that for a time, I was inclined to take Birbhum (literally, the land of the heroic) as only a metaphor that Bankim employed to sharpen the sense of heroic resistance and contestation. And could it be that he brings in Mir Jafar, much against the grain of history only to further villify him ? Some Hindu Bengalis, it would be important to remember, shed tears for Siraj and took Plassey to be an abject betrayal of Bengal's independence.

Lipner is justly unhappy with the three pre-existing translations of the novel though apparently not to the same degree and not quite for the same reasons. The translation by Basanta Koomar Roy (in the 1940s and recently reprinted)[4] is, at best, an adaptation and a fairly tendentious one at that. Lipner demonstrates (pp. 120-22) how Roy's translation not only glossed over vital details regarding plot and characterization but also positively misled his readers. Happily, this does not seem to be the case with the translation by Ghose brothers (Aurobindo and Barindra, 1909-1940s) or that by Naresh Chandra Sen Gupta (1906) Perhaps Lipner should have more explicitly stated the areas of disagreement he has with the two last named rather than leave present readers to form their own conclusions. Here it would also be relevant to add that possibly the earliest English rendering of the song Bande Mataram is by the philologist Harinath De that appeared in the November 11th 1905 issue of the *Indian Mirror*.[5] My discovery of this particular piece too was purely accidental.

Organizationally, Lipner's work is broadly divided into two parts-- a substantive introduction followed by the translation. The introduction that exceeds the length of the translation itself is internally subdivided into five sub-sections. In essence, these seek to accomplish the following: to situate Bankim in his time, recapitulating the history of how the novel came to be written and finally, an intra-textual study of the three available translations. Personally I found the last two quite fascinating though the interested reader may be equally drawn towards the first. There is a critical apparatus appended to the translation that underscores Lipner's very professional handling of the material. For the interested reader again, there are reproductions of select parts of some earlier versions of the novel. A word also about the way 'Anandamath' itself has been translated. Apparently, Lipner finds Sen Gupta's rendering this into the 'Abbey of Bliss' unsatisfactory, presumably on account of this being a rather literal translation. Though Lipner rests his own case on fairly persuasive arguments, the problem I had with the present rendering is that the apellation 'Ananda' in the original Bengali is left untranslated. I could not also bring myself to agree with his view that Bankim was even handed in his judgments of the Muslims (p.69). It occurs to me that whether, rightly or wrongly, Bankim nurtured a deep-seated feeling about the Hindus (as a community) being wronged by the Muslim ruling classes and hence, even when deliberately diluting history for the sake of literary creativity he ends up by using the same to historicize collective memory. I have to confess that I was struck by the eerie similarity between events occurring in Part III chapter 7 of the novel where irate Hindus threaten to destroy a mosque and what we have witnessed in our lifetime. Of late, I have also begun to wonder if the vicarious anti-Muslim tirade of the Hindu Bengali intelligentsia was entirely drawn from Whig-Positivist history writing.

Ironically enough, it appears as though Bankim himself did not expect the novel *Anandamath* to sufficiently energize fellow-Bengalis. "Of what use is my writing *Anandamath* or even your attempting to propagate its underlying message", he wrote to a journalist friend Kaliprosonno Ghosh in Dhaka, "I see no future for a self-seeking and a greatly disunited people as the Bengalis. Instead of the slogan 'Glory to the Mother' ([Bande Mataram) let us cry 'Glory to the belly' (Bande Udaram)!"

Lipner's otherwise excellent work left me clueless about two interesting and intriguing aspects to the novel. First, I noticed that the novel differs from his other writings of the period in so much as it projects Hinduism as being founded in *Jnan* (*Jnanatmak)*, not bhakti. The latter, surely, is the overarching message in the *Dharmatattwa* and *Krishnacharitra*, also produced in the 1880s. Could this be put down to revisionism or a deliberate play of paradigms in keeping with the choice of literary form and the mode of self expression? I raise this question for I found the latter to be very much the case with some near contemporaries like Vivekananda. I am glad that contrary to most scholars, Lipner duly acknowledges the use of both Sakta and Vaishnav symbolism in the *Anandamath*. The category of *santan* itself would warrant that. What I would have liked to understand better is why, in a seeming inversion of Hindu iconography, a Mother-figure is seated on the lap of a male icon, Vishnu. There is an error that occurs inadvertently on page 32. To the best of my knowledge, the figure Nabin Chandra Sen indicated in the text is not the older brother of Keshab Chandra (as Lipner claims) but the poet and civil servant who was also an admirer of Bankim.

On the whole this is an admirable and very enjoyable work—a lasting contribution I dare say, to our understanding of Bankim as a literary figure and cultural propagandist. Together with Hans Harder's study of the *Srimadbhagavatgita*, Lipner's is easily among the best scholarly works on Bankim that I have read in recent years.■

Reference

[1] Published by The Book Review Literary Trust, 2005)

[2] The printing history of *Anandamath* does not necessarily suggest that it was reprinted more frequently or even sold more copies. In Bankim's lifetime, *Kapalakundala* underwent 8 reprints as against 6 for *Anandamath.*

[3] A typical example is that of one Abul Hossain who reviewed some of Bankim's later novels, including *Anandamath*.

[4] A work quite inexplicably left out of the Bibliography

[5] De also translated Part I, Chapter x of the novel where the song occurs.

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Tales from the Lankan shores

B. Mangalam

SWIMMING IN THE MONSOON SEA
By Shyam Selvadurai
Penguin, Delhi, 2005, pp. 211, Rs. 250.00

AT THE WATER'S EDGE
By Pradeep Jegannathan
South Press, 2005, pp. 125, price not mentioned.

Swimming In The Monsoon Sea by Shyam Selvadurai is an engaging tale of teens wrestling with their sexual identity. At the outset, there is nothing much specifically Sri Lankan about the novel except its lush setting teeming with tea estates, sea shores and tropical roses. The novel unfolds a disturbed childhood of fourteen-year-old Amrith who is raised by his dead mother's friends and grows up in material comfort in the midst of fond affection, comraderie with the couple's daughters and a liberal school that nurtures his theatrical talent. The novel's loud announcement at the beginning of the novel, almost as an epigraph, seems misleading: "Srilanka 1980". The reader's preparedness to grapple with the political turmoil of the eighties in Sri Lanka is utterly derailed. Instead what awaits the reader is a young boy's ennui during a school vacation, the thrill of excitement over planning a birthday party for the girls, the witty debunking of the younger girl's secret ambition to become a nun and a mystery of a stormy past of the boy that is revealed in stages (which ultimately is a wash-out, perhaps to bring home the title's significance!)

Selvadurai writes without affectation although he puts in a lot of effort in putting together a coming-of-age story: a staged mystery peopled with ranting and raging characters with motiveless malignity, sub-plots, rhearsals for Othello the resonance of which spills over to middle class bedrooms, Dickensian uncles, aunts and old dowagers who are charming though eccentric but are enormously rich and generous, non-resident, Canada-based Sri Lankans who are laughed at, joked about but also pitied for being neither Lankans nor Canadians, a bunch of school boys, brazen, jealous and fun-loving.

The novel stands out as a healthy dose of nostalgia. Selvadurai manages fairly well to avoid the inevitable pitfalls of nostalgic writing but for the odd temptation to romanticize Viresh. Born in Sri Lanka, the writer moved to Canada at the age of nineteen. This largely explains the dominant craving for the past in the novel — the landscape, the people, the country, the inaccessible childhood, the not so innocent adolescence, the awakening of sexuality, one's first love — all these are coloured by a benign self-indulgence. This novel is Selvadurai's bid to make peace with one's past, recognize its cherished relations and moments and build up an inner strength to accept and rise above them. Since through this novel, the writer seeks to "bid (it) good-bye" to his "happy childhood in Srilanka", the novel presents a tranquil, breezy "Srilanka 1980".

The novel, however, enters the political domain through the personal. Amrith's uneasy but steadily growing attraction for his cousin from Canada pushes him to make a political choice. After an enormous struggle to suppress his sexuality or overcome his jealous passion for Niresh, Amrith finally makes peace with himself: "I am ... different." (p.205) This after being sounded, every so often, that homosexuality is banned in Sri Lanka and invites severe punishment. "It's no laughing matter in this country," Amrith's teacher and director warns the boy who teases Amrith's inclinations (p.173).

Amrith's sexual choice is a political choice that revolts against the state edict — something not unlike what many Tamil youngsters were doing in Sri Lanka in the 1980s, albeit in a different domain. We get a stark peek into this aspect in Pradeep Jeganathan's book *At The Water's Edge*.

Jeganathan's book, short listed for the 2004 Gratiaen Prize in Sri Lanka, is a collection of seven short stories that are interlinked to what one may term the condition of Sri Lanka. Krishna who emerges as a central consciousness is present or is talked about in five of these stories. Two other stories depict how women from the labouring class cope with domestic violence, political instability and ethnic discrimination. Ethnic strife, caste bias, suspicion of minorities, Tamil's struggle to come to terms with a national identity, their marginalization from mainstream society are dealt with great sensitivity by the writer.

Jeganathan's style is non-flamboyant, his tone urbane and his narration straightforward—it has a richness and depth even while retaining a disarming simplicity. He maintains a non-judgemental tone even while pushing his readers to adopt a stand. His success lies in the fact that he suggests intervention without being partisan. His narration is bereft of political rhetoric even as he presents political turmoil or tackles complex, contemporary political situation. His unassuming style, easy, unaffected prose, use of Sinhala/Tamil words in the narration not to exoticize it but rather to underscore the cultural specificity of the political condition bring in a refreshing, much needed new idiom in Sri Lankan short-fiction.

Whether the story is located in a small-town school in 1975 or in a lab at MIT campus, a tea-estate or a noisy street, Jeganathan gives a new edge to intensity of narration: he holds your attention, provokes you to think but does not overwhelm you. He has a keen observation, both visual and intellectual and engages the reader's attention readily. Subtility, elegance and calm assurance mark Jeganathan's narration as well as his characters. Even a crippled beggar in a moving train or a maid stand out for their integrity and self-belief. One does not forget them easily.

Almost all the stories in this collection depict the Tamils as discriminated, victimized and marginalized. They also depict Tamil youth, especially the educated youth whether at home or studying abroad as traumatized by, intensely aware of and involved in the ethnic-political strife in Sri Lanka. 'The Front Row' shows how a Tamil schoolboy tries hard to retain his Sri Lankan identity but is branded as a Tamil, a traitor, an intruder who needs to be thrown out of the country. During a regular row over occupying the seat in the front row, a Sinhala boy lashes out at Krishna, "This is our land, the Sinhala land, and we have to clean out scum like you. Prince Duttu-Gamunu did it before...But that was a long time ago, and we will lose the little we have now if we don't do it again" (p.19).

Jeganathan shows in the above story as well as elsewhere ('The Street', 'A Man From Jaffna', 'Sri Lanka') that a person of authority/power or someone one looks up to for succour is also the one who lets one down, betrays one's trust or blight one's fond expectations. The conflict of trust that is contested between a victim, a less-privileged or less empowered and a powerful, authoritative person or institutionalized authority forms the overriding motif in this short story collection. This motif is also employed to underscore the Tamil-Sinhala negotiation involving identity, social space and political legitimacy.

'Sri Lanka' is by far the masterpiece in this collection, edging out the superbly crafted, multi-layered, brooding, inward-looking story, 'At The Water's Edge'. Its title is a superb stroke to bring out the different aspects of the Sri Lankan condition — cultural, political, national as well as international mediation and response to the prolonged crisis, violence and instability. Sri Lanka in the story deftly moves from being a subject to the position of an object — an object of western curiosity, academic showmanship, a political capital. The locale and lingo of MIT campus helps in converging the different facets of the politics of Sri Lanka in an awesome critique of interventions at home and abroad. Some of the most tender as well as terrifying moments of Sri Lanka in 1983 are captured in the story admirably.

Valli in 'The Watch', Karuna in 'The Street', Siddha in 'At The Water's Edge' bring out how women cope or fail to cope with the difficult times during a long drawn-out ethnic-civil strife. The woman question and the Sri Lankan question intersect but Jeganathan's handling of the gender angle is less incisive.

Jeganathan's fiction holds out immense promise for Sri Lankan literature as well as its society.■

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Meaningful Verse

Bodh Prakash

ANTHEMS OF RESISTANCE: A CELEBRATION OF PROGRESSIVE URDU POETRY
By Raza Mir and Ali Husain Mir
IndiaInk / Roli Books, 2006, pp. 248, price not stated.

The title of the book itself indicates the motivation behind it, viz. a celebration of Progressive Urdu poetry. The authors, Ali Hasan Mir and Raza Mir set out to "reclaim the legacy of the progressive poets in an age when their words, insights, and politics continue to be relevant". They discuss the work of poets like Josh, Kaifi Azmi and Ali Sardar Jaffri who had written about exploitation, oppression, resistance and revolution in general and in particular about the struggle first against colonialism and imperialism and then against the Indian nation state, which they deemed to be hand in glove with the imperialists. The socialist utopia that was imagined in their typically flamboyant flourishes clearly had a transnational character, owing allegiance to "classless" and "revolutionary" China and the Soviet Union.

At the time of its inception the Progressive Writers Association consciously widened the scope of its manifesto in order to ensure the inclusion of writers who were not necessarily communists but were broadly socialist, anti-colonial and progressive in their outlook. However this wider space considerably shrank in the period after Independence on account of the rather rigid position taken by Ranadive on the role of the writer as an active participant in the struggle to overthrow the bourgeois imperialist Indian state. This led to a split within the PWA. However, though the authors note the weakening of the movement on account of it ("Its period of uncontested hegemony had come to an end.") and outline how the new manifesto of 1949 divided the world into two clearly demarcated camps, the democratic and the imperialist, and India into two groups, feudal reactionaries and progressive forces, they refrain from commenting on the tremendous setback this caused to the movement. The self professed correctness of an approach that sees the world as divided into black and white with no grey areas is never questioned by the authors in their overzealous desire to lionize the stalwarts of progressive Urdu poetry.

The authors fall for all the shibboleths that have been made popular by the communists in India, viz. the independence of 1947 was a myth since power was simply transferred from the British imperialists to their Indian counterparts; a truly democratic and socialist society could only be established through a revolutionary transformation and the inspiration for this would come from Palestine, Vietnam, China and the Soviet Union.

The book has an interesting take on the progressives' rejection of religious identities particularly in the period after 1947. Instead of explaining it in terms of the thesis that religion was the "opium of the masses", they argue that for Muslim progressive poets "the burden of the minority and the urge to prove their fidelity to an India that was growing suspicious of its Muslim citizens weighed heavily on them." This is why many progressive poets penned militant verses during the Indo-Chinese war, Kaifi's song for the film *Haqeeqat*, being an example. This is at best a speculative argument. It does make it difficult to reconcile it with the generally accepted image of Kaifi as a passionate revolutionary.

On Sahir, the foremost and exemplary progressive poet, the authors come closest to an acknowledgement of the problems of programmatic poetry. "Notwithstanding the short shrift he has received, Sahir's work does not allow the serious critic to wave it off,... because of the fact that Sahir pushed the boundaries of an explicitly political brand of poetry that served as an aesthetic experiment of the time." The authors quote the Marxist critics and theoreticians, Nikolai Bukharin, Christopher Cauldwell and George Thomson, to justify Sahir's poetry, particularly that which is unabashedly pro-worker and anti-capitalist. Even if one goes along with the authors' passionate defence of Sahir's commitment to the cause, and much though one is moved by some of the moving lyrics that he wrote for the film *Pyaasa*, one still has to ask the question if *this* qualifies as poetry:

> My heart cannot countenance the celebration of high culture
> Even if I wish, I cannot give voice to dream-laden images.

Unfortunately, the authors' strong desire to idolize Sahir makes them approvingly quote even verses such as this:

> If the wealth of the nation has increased, why this growing poverty?
> Whatever has happened to the path towards ordinary peoples' prosperity?

In the chapter 'Urdu Poetry and the Progressive Aesthetic', the authors outline how from the time of Hali, there was a movement towards making Urdu poetry utilitarian, to leave behind the wonders of the *saki* and the *jaam* and take up problems other than individual love and sorrow. The older images of the bulbul and the *shama* acquired a new meaning in the hands of the Progressives. They constantly engaged with contemporary issues like the Bengal famine, the anti-imperialist struggle or the tragedy of Partition. And while they believed that human suffering was universal they also insisted that it could be brought to an end. Their struggle for justice and equality was not limited to Indians alone but extended to the whole world. Going beyond religion, community and nation the Progressive poets developed an internationalist sensibility. In the chapter 'From Home to the World' the authors distinguish the internationalism of the progressives from that of the pan-Islamism of Iqbal or other poets who eulogized Algerian freedom fighters and the Palestinian cause from a pan-Islamic perspective.

The book suggests that the success of this poetry was in large measure due to the fact that it represented the aspirations of the people. But in the period after Independence, the progressive aesthetic lost its broad appeal, because the middle-class (the principal consumer) betrayed the cause: "The middle class sought its emancipation, not through challenging the system, but by learning to play its game." To blame the middle class for the diminishing appeal of progressive poetry is somewhat misplaced, given that the PWA was itself critical of some of the foremost poets and writers like Ismat Chughtai, Manto, N. M. Rashid, Rajinder Singh Bedi and even Faiz for not toeing the line of the Communist Party strictly enough after the 1949 Bhiwandi conference.

Progressive poets saw the movement for Independence as integrally related to socialist ideals. Freedom from the British meant for them freedom from all forms of exploitation. Thus when the "promised dawn" did not come, they blamed the Indian state and the Congress leadership. Faiz's extremely moving poem "Subh-e Azaadi" collapsed the redness of revolutionary fervour with the blood spilt over Partition: "*Voh intezaar tha jiska ye voh sahar to nahin.*" However, with the passage of time the split within the two factions of the CPI headed by P. C. Joshi and Ranadive made the PWA a weaker force with diminishing influence. The anti-war, pacifist position was also not apparent after the Chinese war of 1962 and the first Indo-Pak war of 1965. Except for Ali Sardar Jafri and Sahir most of the writers took a tough line against Pakistan.

In the chapter on the Progressives' perspective on modernity and the consequent critique of religion, the authors distinguish the radical Marxist poets from their predecessors like Ghalib and Mir. While the latter made sly attacks not on religion itself but on the hypocrisy of the priestly class, the radical progressives critiqued the very notion of Faith as obscurantism. Firm believers in rationality, they were extremely dismissive of religion.

However, the belief in modernity was to be later tempered with the realization that by itself it was not capable of establishing an egalitarian

At the time of its inception the Progressive Writers Association consciously widened the scope of its manifesto in order to ensure the inclusion of writers who were not necessarily communists but were broadly socialist, anti-colonial and progressive in their outlook. However this wider space considerably shrank in the period after Independence on account of the rather rigid position taken by Ranadive on the role of the writer as an active participant in the struggle to overthrow the bourgeois imperialist Indian state.

society. A modernity that serves the interests of capitalism and the modern nation-state cannot be accepted as unequivocally good. And the failure of modernity was to be seen in the tainted moment of freedom, the sectarian conflict in South Asia and above all in the inability of the state to provide a dignified life for its citizens.

Perhaps the most readable chapters in the entire book are the ones on Progressive poetry and film lyrics. In contemporary times when lyrics are completely overshadowed by sound, the authors remind us of the tremendous contributions made by several progressive poets like Sahir, Kaifi Azmi and Majrooh Sultanpuri to the Hindi film industry in the fifties and the sixties. If there were Sahir's radical lyrics in the unforgettable Guru Dutt film *Pyaasa*, severely castigating the national leadership for the terrible economic deprivation in which women were forced to sell their bodies (*Jinhen naaz hai Hind par voh kahaan hain?*) the IPTA poet Prem Dhawan sounded a more optimistic note with his popular "*Chhoro kal ki baaten*,..." Even the radical Sahir could on occasion strike a more optimistic note. ("*Saathi haath badhana*...") With the shift to popular films the space for socially committed film makers reduced. And with the advent of cassette culture, meaningful lyrics gave way to inane ones like "*Gapuchi gapuchi gam gam, kishiki kishiki kam kam*" written by none other than the great Sahir himself! The decade of the eighties saw the emergence of fusion music in which sound alone was supreme. It is only now that a poet like Javed Akhtar has recovered some ground for the lyrics despite the constraints. The authors insightfully conclude that popular culture is an ideologically contested ground. According to them Bollywood blockbusters and songs are merely escapist fantasies that legitimize the status quo. Hopefully some of that is changing with film makers now attempting to raise socially relevant issues like communalism or casteism in mainstream cinema like *Bombay* and *Swades*. It is perhaps also worth pondering why people cutting across classes have flocked to watch "escapist" blockbusters.

In the second chapter on film lyrics, the authors narrate how the Bombay film industry provided a space for Urdu poetry at a time when the language had been relegated to the margins after the Partition. Hindi film songs have in the long run become one of the "most valuable repositories for the safe keeping and nurturing of Urdu poetry and idiom." One of the questions that emerges is whether the issue of a national language has not been quietly resolved by the "Hindustani" film industry given that they are avidly watched by viewers cutting across all linguistic categories in India. After all, as the authors note, among contemporary lyricists, Javed Akhtar employs Persian terms (*posheeda* or *khwaabeeda*) as easily as the Awadhi dialect (*Bijuri ki talwar nahin*,...) or even the Ramlila tradition in a film like *Swades*. Bombay films have perhaps done more than merely provide a refuge to Urdu poetry, they have quietly played a stellar role in national integration by drawing their inspiration from the rich linguistic and cultural diversity of India. Now as Indians increasingly look to colonize foreign shores, films too follow suit in their choice of locales, however "escapist" one may consider them!

Notwithstanding his occasional descent into mediocre lyrics in films, Sahir's centrality in Progressive Urdu poetry is doubly stressed in a separate chapter. He is lauded as the ardent champion of the oppressed people, a pacifist, a forthright critic of religion and a spokesperson of the left. Admittedly Sahir's passionate lyrics have inspired a whole generation of Indians, but the zeal of the authors becomes a trifle irritating, given that Sahir's contribution figures in every other chapter.

The strength of the book lies in the two chapters in which the authors explore some of the new voices in Urdu poetry, those of Javed Akhtar and the feminist poets from Pakistan. The authors recognize that Akhtar apart from a being an inheritor of the progressive tradition is also a contemporary poet and a realist. Perhaps the humility of the poet in his poem on Mother Teresa is the new note that the authors fail to detect. Even if one accepts that Javed Akhtar is the successor of the famed progressive poets, it is interesting to observe that the shrill note of his predecessors and their smug certainty is nowhere to be heard. Instead what we have is the self-conscious irony in the subject's position and his location among the very people whom he gently ridicules. "Faced with a cut-throat world in which he finds himself hopelessly implicated, Akhtar does not pitch camp on a moral high round, choosing instead to deploy sharp cynicism as a tool of his critique;..."

The love poetry of Akhtar is modern and related intrinsically to contemporary reality. Unlike the classical love poetry or progressive poetry with its hope of consummation in an egalitarian world, Akhtar writes on the transience of the emotion, the influence of the environment and the past on the lover's relationship and the tragic irony of love in a modern world. In fact one can detect strains of Eliot in his romanticism which is constantly undercut by his realism.

Perhaps Akhtar's break from the Progressives is nowhere better exemplified than in his poem 'Jurm aur Sazaa', in which the poet/plaintiff acknowledges his crime of having "kept a few dreams" for himself, even after agreeing to sell all of them in the market. The punishment is severe: not only is he to give up all that he has concealed, he is now doomed to live a life, devoid of any dreams. Faiz's defiant prisoner has been replaced by the ironical poet/dreamer who is forced to peddle his wares in the market.

The chapter on the new feminist poets from Pakistan discusses how the Progressives did not really go beyond their classical predecessors in the representation of women as symbols of purity and beauty. The contribution of the feminist poets, particularly Fehmida Riaz and Kishwar Naheed, against General Zia's vicious attack on women's rights is extremely significant. The book also notes that with the exception of Habib Jalib, there were hardly any male poets who took up the women's cause at that time. Feminist poets not only opposed the sexist policies of Zia, they also criticized the political and social structures that were being used to deny dignity and equality to the Pakistani people. The authors approvingly quote the well known Pakistani critic Rukhsana Ahmad's statement that the women feminist poets of Pakistan were the true inheritors of the progressive tradition. However some questions arise in this context. Why have progressive male poets not been a part of the feminist revolt? And why do we not have an equally strident feminist voice emerging from progressive Urdu poets in India? The answers would be useful in contextualizing Pakistani feminist poetry in a more nuanced manner.

The book ends with a requiem and a celebration. A requiem for the authors and their inspiring poetry which lost its verve and zeal with the passage of time and a celebration to once again acknowledge their contribution to the utopian egalitarian and just vision that was fashioned in the crucible of the anti-colonial movement for Independence. It is of course worth speculating on why the powerful and engaging vision of the progressive poets lost its lustre. And to do this meaningfully one needs to go beyond the stock radical answers of bourgeois hegemonic control.■

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Faiz in English Original

Sukrita Paul Kumar

CULTURE AND IDENTITY: SELECTED ENGLISH WRITINGS OF FAIZ
Compiled and Edited by Sheema Majeed
Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005, pp. 261

The mere mention of the name Faiz Ahmed Faiz evokes a warm adulation, as much in the highbrow scholarly critic as in the mind of the common reader, not restricted to the Urdu world. Faiz became in fact a legendry figure in his own life time, an icon to reckon with. When Sheema Majeed, in her "Editor's Note" in the book, *Culture and Identity*, refers to him as a "metaphor of his age", she directs one's attention to the gradual unfolding of different aspects of the spirit of the times presented in Faiz's English writings. What she has compiled in this book arouses the attention of all, readers in Urdu as well as those who can read Faiz only in English. Several attempts have been made to transport the vibrant poems by Faiz into English, some fairly successful and others mere experiments in translating great poetry. But, what we get in this book for the first time is Faiz's original writing in English, his insights, reflections and random thoughts on 'culture', 'identity', 'Pakistan', 'Urdu and linguistic identity and literary heritage of Pakistan' and amongst many other themes, he also dwells on some individual poets and writers such as Amir Khusrou, Ghalib and his favourite Mohammad Iqbal.

It would not just be performing a ritual to quote in this review, first and foremost, from Faiz's solitary poem in English, 'The Unicorn and the Dancing Girl', included in this volume:

The birth of time out of timelessness
is beset like all births
with travail, and hope, and joy and apprehension.
And its birth in Pakistan as elsewhere in
the newly liberated countries of Asia
and Africa
is as yet only a small flag of freedom
raised against
The bannered and embattled host of
fear and want and hunger and
Pain
and the death of human hearts.

Pakistan, and for that matter, India too, with their newly begot liberation from the oppressive colonial rulers, could at best carry but a "small flag of freedom" when confronted by the host of "want and hunger and pain". Faiz captures the delicate contradictions of his times in his poetry and his insights seem to come out of his deep concern for the multitude of ordinary people battling for survival. He knits into his poem a strong philosophic strain while he sounds playful in tone and words.

In his Introduction to the book, Mohammad Reza Kazimi, makes a very pertinent comment on how some poets define and interpret their cultures. While for medieval India, it was Amir Khusrou who interpreted culture and for the English speaking world it was T.S Eliot, for Pakistan, it was Faiz who took it upon himself to get into that role. What alerted him to the culture of Pakistan initially had a lot to do with the dominance of Urdu over the indigenous languages of Pakistan. Urdu he noticed was the mother tongue of a tiny minority : "Hardly any child sulks in Urdu, hardly any mother sang lullabies in Urdu". To him as he repeatedly demonstrates, language cannot be separated from the culture it carries within its folds. When it is regional languages, such as Punjabi, Pushto, Saraiki etc, that project the culture of the land, how then, he interrogates, can a language that is imposed from above be seen as representing the values, ideals or ideology of the masses.

Kazimi sums up the debate : "...Faiz called history the length, geography the breadth, region, class and language the depth of culture". But he does leave scope for a synthesis of regional cultures in his definition of 'national culture'. This cannot be realized, he emphasizes, if the creative potentialities of regional art and culture are allowed to wilt and die.

In the first section of the book, "Autobiographical", in the piece entitled 'Faiz on Faiz', lies the explanation for the poet-writer's extraordinary sensitivity to issues relating to the common man and the development of his own progressive ideals. The four years of solitary confinement in the prison were most productive for him: "...I had no amusements...had plenty of time to read and one felt angry all the time because one knew one was innocent...So during these four years, I wrote two books of poetry". When he came out of the prison, he found himself a greater celebrity than before!

When Faiz talks of "Cross-Cultural Encounter in East-West literature", he traces the earliest exposure of Urdu literature to the English literary influence and sees the advent of the modern movement in Delhi College in the early nineteenth century in Delhi. The foundations of a real cross-cultural encounter were laid both in the reception as well as propagation of European literature and science on the one hand, and on the other, in empowering Urdu through translations as well as original writing. Faiz quotes a noted Delhi scholar, Maulvi Zakaullah of Delhi College, to show how the English rulers and their civilization had become a political and social compulsion. Patterns of cross-cultural repercussions, as he calls them, kept emerging in a variety of ways prior to this period, as also till much later, when in the early twentieth century a number of new literary movements in various Indian languages were fertilized by western aesthetics and literary concerns. Faiz gives a quick overview of the dynamics of East-West cultural encounters here.

A major issue that seeks repeated deliberation in this book is the question of culture and national identity in Pakistan. One of the propositions posed by Faiz draws one into a significant debate: "If Pakistan is an ideological state and its ideology is Islam, isn't Muslim culture or Islamic culture an adequate definition of Pakistani culture?" Faiz raises this point if only to get an opportunity to logically demolish such a position by establishing how the parameters of culture cannot lie constrained within geographical boundaries of this nation. Ironically, on the other hand, for him, culture also evolves necessarily from within a specific region or area. In that, Faiz argues for a realization of the notion of cultural diversity inherent in national culture which is, he states, an 'aggregate of regional cultures'.

'Writers, Where do You Stand?' Such interrogative pieces included in the volume reveal the poet's anguish as well as anger at the inactivity of the contemporary writer towards fighting for freedom of expression, and basic national and human rights.

Faiz's English writings offer thoughts and ideas of a poet who after all worked also as a journalist and a teacher of English. Needless to say, not only will this book further enrich the understanding of his powerful poems but it is also a significant input towards building a sensitive, pro-people approach to understanding culture and identity in Pakistan.■

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Looking For Lost Horizons

Nalini Jain

THE COLOUR OF MEHNDI
By Nausheen Pasha-Zaidi
Frog Books, Bombay, 2006, pp. 248, Rs. 300.00

Some excellent writing has emerged from the Pakistani Diaspora in recent years. Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India* is probably the best known. Woven around the theme of Partition it was widely acclaimed through a series of literary prizes. Deepa Mehta made it into a film called *Earth.* Sidhwa's latest book, *An American Brat,* was published in 1993.

Sara Suleri is another Pakistani-American woman writer – a fine novelist and a versatile literary critic. *Meatless Days* (1990), a novel shot with fine observations and sharp wit contends with her *The Rhetoric of English in India,* a postcolonial critique of British writing on India, as Suleri's claim to fame.

With such an illustrious ancestry it is difficult to appreciate the stock devices and overdone theme of Pasha-Zaidi's *The Colour of Mehndi.* A woman struggling with her failing marriage and looking vainly for the lost horizon of her erstwhile ambitions remains a subject of universal concern. That her life should be uncovered through a series of audio-tapes by her son, who otherwise does not remember his mother, is by now too common a strategy of remembering a forgotten and fragmented life. Again, mental illness, the distorted if not silenced woman's voice, has been a major subject of concern for feminist critics. But it is overdone now for sometime, and only an extremely talented writer could revive it as a central theme. Much else that occupies Pasha-Zaidi, the woman returning to her maternal home in Pakistan with her brood of children only to realize that she would be a pathetic dependent, the double standards of the Pakistani male, and finally the trauma of marital infidelity, real or imagined, are all concerns that need a fine stylist to lift them out of the mundane.

Nausheen Pasha-Zaidi makes an interesting claim at the start of her book. She says that she wrote her novel as an expression of the pain that patients of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder suffer, and the effects of that pain on family and friends. Herself a patient of this illness, she identifies with the struggle of the protagonist Nazli, through the writing of whose fictional life she seems to have worked out some sort of balance in her own life – "Through Nazli's life, I found healing. Although the disorder will probably never leave me, I have discovered a delicate peace –for now". The book, however, does not make clear that Nazli's mental illness is its main theme. It meanders all over the place from teenage dating, summer jobs, to marriage and the difficulty of bringing up children. Nazli's death at the end, a solution that she sees as best for her children and husband: "It was better this way. My kinds would be safe … He was a good dad after all. And the kids loved their Dadi. Why should everyone suffer because of me?", once again trivializes an already overworked stance. The author's claim that the disturbing ending "characterizes one of the tragic side-effects of the improper use of anti-depressants" does not make a good medical manual out of an uninspiring novel.■

Nalini Jain is a Professor in the English Department of Delhi University. Contemporary fiction, particularly diaspora writing, is one of her interests.

Loss and Longing

Mala Pandurang

THE INHERITANCE OF LOSS
By Kiran Desai
Penguin Books, India, 2006, pp. 324, Rs. 495.00

The merit of this novel undoubtedly lies in Kiran Desai's brilliant prose, her observant descriptions of Kalimpong and Mount Kachenjunga; the remarkable use of turns of phases, and her sensitivity to the trappings of poverty and class. However, what is disturbing is the sustained presentation of binaries of the developing world (have-nots, poverty stricken, unsafe, violent, brutal) and the developed world (haves, a haven to escape to, exploitative, uncaring), and the continued projection of the West as a destination that the rest of the non-West aspires to attain, come whatever may.

The *Inheritance of Loss* has a minimal plot. The narrative is set at the foot of Mount Kanchenjunga in the Himalayas. It is 1986 when the story opens with a robbery by young insurgents, who force their way into a retired judge's decrepit colonial mansion and steal his hunting rifles in the presence of the judge, his seventeen-year-old granddaughter Sai, his cook, and his purebred dog Mutt. The narrative then weaves back and forth, offering the personal histories of the characters, and the political background to a growing discontent and insurgency of the Indian Nepalese youth, "fed up with being treated like the minority in a place where they were the majority" (p.19). The Gorkhaland National Liberation Front (GNLF) is now seeking a separate Nepali state , and as acts of violence, and of police brutality mount, the lives of the non-Nepalis who have resided in the hills for decades take tragic twists, as they become unwanted outsiders, and prisoners of their own location.

This is a story as much of loss, as it is of bittersweet longing for a world that eludes each of the characters, as a consequence of their class backgrounds and post/colonial legacies. They thereby become the inheritors of loss.

Justice Jemubhai Patel is a self-centered retired Chief Justice who has opted for the life of a recluse, and has little compassion for any one except, perhaps, his red setter Mutt. The sudden imposed responsibility of guardianship of his granddaughter Sai takes Jembubhai back to "the burning memories of his beginnings" (p.61), when in 1939 he departed for education at Cambridge. In the alien and cold environment of the colonial power, "his pusillanimity and his loneliness had found a fertile soil" (p.39), and "he retreated into a solitude that grew in weight day by day. The solitude became a habit, the habit became the man, and it crushed him into a shadow" (p.39). Yet despite his unhappiness as an alien in England, he envies the English and loathes Indians, and grows increasingly embittered by the realization that he "would be despised by absolutely everyone, English and Indians and both." Jemubhai's sickening abusive treatment of his wife Nimi makes him one of the most dislikeable characters of Indian fiction in English.

Sai is orphaned when her parents are crushed by a local bus in Moscow and is compelled to leave the convent and stay with her grandfather. By virtue of her anglicized education, she too, is "an estranged Indian living in India" (p.210). Sai has a brief romance with Gyan, her 20-year-old Nepali maths tutor. Gyan despises the bourgeoisie life style of Cho Oyu and is sympathetic with the cause of the GNFL. He therefore rejects a potential relationship with Sai because she becomes a "reflection of all the contradictions around her" (p.262).

Parallel to the narrative of class divides in Kalimpong is the story of the cook's son Biju. It is the cook's desire was for modernity that propels him to send his only son to the United States of America. Here Biju experiences "a whole world in the basement of kitchens of New York" (p.22), and is overwhelmed by the presence of labour of the Indian diaspora in the cogs of global economies. He must also bear the brunt of the resentment with which the world thought of Indians:

In Tanzania, if they could, they would throw them out like
they did in Uganda,
In Madagascar, if they could, they would throw them out.
In Nigeria, if they could, they would throw them out.
In Fiji, if they could, they would throw them out.
In China, they hate them.
In Hong Kong,
In Germany.
In Italy.
In Japan.
In Guam.
In Singapore.
Burma.
South Africa.
They don't like them.
In Guadeloupe – they love us there?
No. (p.77).

Biju's experiences are reflective of those of the "shadow class" of illegal migrant workers, condemned to constant movement as they evade immigration authorities. How Biju desires "the triumphant After The Green Card Return Home, thirsted for it—to be able to buy a ticket with the air of someone who could return if he wished, or not, if he didn't wish …" (p. 99). He watches "the legalized foreigners with envy" but this envy grows into contempt for those who give up original lifestyles for more hybridized habits, and Biju emerges as "a new person, a man full to the brim with a wish to live within a narrow purity" (p. 137).

Tired of the pain and humiliation of eking out an existence, Biju makes the return journey home out of fear of the greatest loss that can come out of long term separation from one's family—to return home after a quarter of a lifetime only to find "the love was gone; for affection was only a habit after all, and people, they forgot, or they come accustomed to it, its absence" (p. 233). He is warned however of the consequences of this decision when Mr. Kakkar tells him of a world "where one side travels to be a servant, and the other side travels to be treated like a king. You want your son to be on this side or that side?" (p. 269). On arrival in Calcutta, Biju's 'enormous anxiety' of being a foreigner ebbs (p.300). He is then symbolically stripped of material possessions that he has carried back home with him, as he makes a hazardous journey up the hills. In a rather elusive conclusion, the cook and his son reunite.

The merit of this novel undoubtedly lies in Kiran Desai's brilliant prose, her observant descriptions of Kalimpong and Mount Kachenjunga; the remarkable use of turns of phases, and her sensitivity to the trappings of poverty and class. However, what is disturbing is the sustained presentation of binaries of the developing world (have-nots, poverty stricken, unsafe, violent, brutal) and the developed world (haves, a haven to escape to, exploitative, uncaring), and the continued projection of the West as a destination that the rest of the non-West aspires to attain, come whatever may.■

Mala Pandurang is Head of the Department of English, BMN College, Mumbai.

About Obsessions

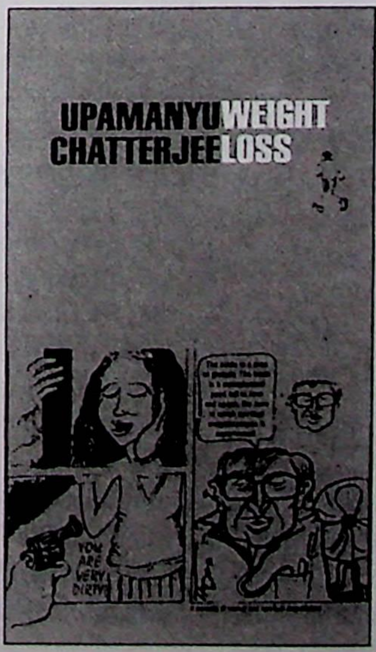
G.J.V. Prasad

WEIGHT LOSS: A COMEDY OF SEXUAL AND SPIRITUAL DEGRADATION
By Upamanyu Chatterjee
Penguin Viking, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 416, Rs. 495.00

As our ever-growing population, and the increasing number of cases of molestations and rapes, and the shocking number of HIV positive people, and our record in trafficking and child prostitution, and our venerable Khushwant Singh testify, sex is always present in the mind and motivates many of the actions of the average Indian male of any age. Yet, sex is taboo in this land of the *Kamasutra*, the moral police is everywhere and is made up of the very men who will do anything for a piece of the 'evil' and 'sick' action, made so as a result of their public prudery and posturing. So millions and millions of Indians indulge in acts that they consider corrupt and degrading, living out snatches of sexual fantasies on the suspecting and unsuspecting. Upamanyu Chatterjee has always asked uncomfortable questions and here is the one he asks time and again – how do we live with ourselves in this country?

Weight Loss is about obsession and the main character, whose obsessions it maps, is called Bhola, the innocent. Bhola is ruled by his sexual urge, for men as well as women (and if circumstances had permitted he might have tried other outlets as well, like the cattle he is told village boys lose their virginity to), and constructs his entire life around his obsession for Titli, a vegetable vendor, her husband Moti, and assorted other characters like his landlady, Mrs. Manchanda. Pursuing Titli and her husband (he actually succeeds with the husband first) almost all his life, which he ends by slitting his wrists at the age of 37, Bhola follows the path of "sexual and spiritual degradation" that the subtitle of the novel promises.

The novel begins with school where Bhola's obsession with his Physical Education teacher, Anthony, is the stuff of sado-masochist fantasy. While others have graduated to obsessing with their women teachers, Bhola and his friend, Dosto (named after the unspellable Russian author but obviously a short cut to name a friend of the protagonist—'Dosto to aisa'), lust for men mainly, with Dosto in love with his driver and Bhola doing everything to get punished by Anthony, to touch him as roughly as the teacher deals with him. Soon, Bhola graduates to lusting after women teachers as well. But he is equally attracted and repelled by many others. Almost all his memorable encounters are sexual—with his cook, or the eunuchs or with a flashing sadhu. The school section will encourage many into thinking that this is a vastly funny book that will show the growth and maturity of the protagonist, how he overcomes his Jesuit schooling and Hindu upbringing. However, neither the novel nor the protagonist goes anywhere else. This is a dark novel, funny in spite of being so dark, and extremely believable in spite of its seemingly unreal world where all decisions taken by the protagonist are because of his sexual urges (except the one to have a baby!). But then this is a novel about a society where almost everybody has sex on the mind all the time, where morality or codes of acceptable behaviour are only about maintaining facades, where nobody's life is fulfilling in any way.



This is a novel about India. A nation obsessed with purification and rituals is also a nation that needs them desperately to keep its truths at bay. Not only is repression a sign of our contemporary times, we have always had a fundamental schism in our attitude to sex and sexuality. This ambiguity or difference in our ancient philosophical approaches to sexuality is that sex is to be celebrated and is a path to liberation, while it is at the same time to be controlled and sublimated because it ties us down to the material world. Bhola's other obsessions, with weight loss and living the day according to disciplinary rules that he has set up including his daily jogging, mirror this dichotomy. His need to discipline the body is the other side of the coin from his need to indulge his bodily appetites. This ambiguous balance is reflected in the number of people he has slept with in about sixteen years of sexual activity – eight, four men and four women. Bhola wants life on his own terms; he wants sex without the muddying effects of love or emotional commitment, he wants to maintain order and control; he wants to be the dominant partner in his relationships, to take or leave as he pleases. Hence, all his movements in the novel, including his choice of an obscure college in the hills, is in pursuit of the couple he desires – they try to evade him, and he cannot let them disappear, the choice should have been his not theirs. While they acquiesce to him in his sexual desires and directions, both being scrupulously correct in dealing with him as a client, they also lead lives of their own, only tangentially connected to him.

In fact, this is a novel about dissociation, about dysfunctional families and societies. Bhola's own family is never really there – and when the father actually understands, Bhola has no time for him. Dosto marries Anin, Bhola's one-time neighbour who had looked him over voyeuristically during his nude day dreams; a girl who had attacked her own sister with murderous intent. Bhola's wife, Anin's sister, still finds solace at the breast of her ayah. Their father is a typical police wallah, always ready to bend rules and bend over maids. From cooks to drivers, to the quack doctor Borkar, all are willing to play the game of sex and manipulation.

As I said before, you believe in Bhola and you believe him when he says towards the end of his life that he "felt like a boy, an adolescent not waiting for the adventures of life but one whom they—and life itself—had quietly bypassed." (p.373) But the joke here is that he is comparing himself to "a white resident of Milwaukee, USA, who had been a murderer, a molester of male children, a necrophile and a cannibal" and all of it by thirty-one! Bhola has achieved nothing in comparison. But Bhola has been true to himself, even if he has not been completely truthful to others, including his wife. He has indulged in every sexual fantasy that he may have had and has disciplined his body as much as he could. However, as a student or as a lecturer in the same college in the hills, Bhola manages for the most part to maintain the façade of decorum, even managing to arrange his marriage.

It is the birth of his desired child and a near death experience that change Bhola into a sentimental mode. Ironically, his life changes back again because he is wrongly suspected of having molested his own child, a child who seemed to presage a second life for him, a life of emotional bonding and sharing that he had been incapable of till then. This reversal is also ironic because keen to celebrate life after his lucky escape he is finally left with no alternative but to take his own life – the ultimate act in his weight loss programme – giving up the body itself.

Weight Loss is a brilliantly written book, though many may not want to read it. Those who last the distance with this book are guaranteed to lose some weight.■

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New Lores by a Modern 'O Tashi'

Tilottoma Misra

THESE HILLS CALLED HOME: STORIES FROM A WAR ZONE
By Temsula Ao
Zubaan and Penguin, New Delhi, 2006, pp.147, Rs.195.00

In the Ao Naga tradition, no story-telling is complete without the singing of a ballad, a dirge or a hunting song. "It would not be an exaggeration to say that the poetic element forms the core of any discourse or narration in Ao folklore", says Temsula Ao in her book *The Ao –Naga Oral Tradition* (Baroda, 1999). True to this tradition, in *These Hills Called Home*, the author has combined in herself the poet and the story-teller, the one supplementing the other. Temsula began her writing career as a poet . Her four volumes of poetry — *Songs That Tell* (Writers' Workshop, 1988), *Songs That Try to Say* (Writers' Workshop, 1992), *Songs of Many Moods* (Delhi, 1995), and *Songs from Here and There* (NEHU, 2003), contain songs that sing of bygone days, of nature, love, death and pain. There is a deep sense of pathos in all her early poetry, as though the poet is searching for a medium or a theme that would give a stable rock-like quality to her art . It seems she has found it at last and the joy of that discovery has miraculously transformed her poetry too. Like the origin myth of the Ao Nagas which tells of the emergence of the tribe from six ancient rocks, Temsula's recent poems and her prose-tales bear witness to her metamorphosis from a singer of nostalgic, plaintive songs reflective of the poet's temporary loss of touch with her homeland, to a powerful writer who has decided to talk about her own people and represent a tradition that is fast disappearing in a modern world. Like the old story teller in one of her recent poems, Temsula too has realized, "I was born to tell stories" :

I have lived and grown old
With our stories in my blood
And telling them
With every breath I exhaled.

The present volume of short stories is the product of the author's conscious decision to go back home and strive to revive a tradition which runs in her "life-blood". It is a tradition that preserves the histories and identities of her ancestors in the Naga hills. But, when she begins the arduous symbolic journey up the hills (the real physical details of such a journey has been described in vivid details in the story 'The Journey'), she finds that everything in the war-ravaged hills is changed utterly, in Yeatsian terms, and "a terrible beauty" has been born. In one of her new poems Temsula tells the whole story of the transformation of Naga identity after the colonial encounter in the beginning of the twentieth century. The invasion of the new order that came with the Book, compelled the people to reject their own histories and tradition as worthless.

They taught us that our Rivers and Rocks
Were no gods, and our songs
Had no worth and our stories
Nothing but the primitive prattle
Of mindless savages
("Blood of Other Days")

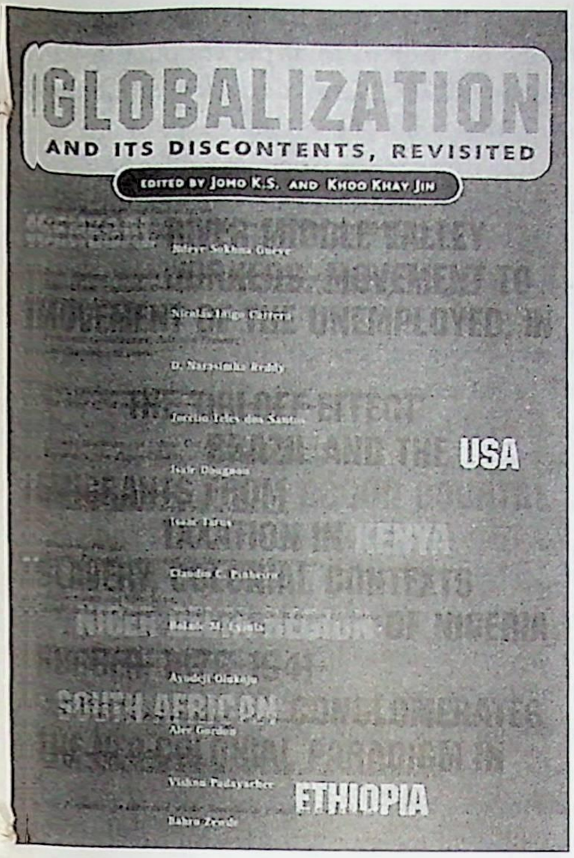
But with the long-drawn battle for self-determination , a new era dawned in the hills when people began to resurrect the memories of the past in order to shape a new identity for themselves. The stories in *These Hills Called Home* are a unique record of this resurrection of a collective memory of a community. Despite its being the author's first attempt at writing short stories, the reader is at once struck by the natural ease with which Temsula assumes the role of the ancient story-teller (the *O Tashi* of the Aos) and combines it with the art of the modern short-story writer. In story after story, the author portrays with extraordinary sensitivity the struggle of ordinary people to survive in a chaotic world. What grips the reader's attention is the stark economy of words and a deceptive simplicity of expression that depict complex situations without missing the moral ambiguities involved. In the stories depicting the lives of the Naga underground soldiers ('Shadows', 'An Old Man Remembers'), for example, there is no attempt to romanticize the situation . The perspective is not that of someone who is unable to see the moral dilemma, but rather, there is an effort to adopt a multiple perspective of the woman who sympathizes and the writer who can judge. In some of the stories, the folk and the realistic mode merge in a powerful way to bring home the tragedy and the pathos of one of the most violent phases of the Naga struggle when innocent villagers were subjected to brutal torture and punitive measures by the Indian army for their alleged complicity with the insurgent cause. The story of the young and beautiful Apenyo singing her last song before she is savagely raped and killed in a village Church-gathering, is retold by an old woman to a group of young people who have forgotten how to listen to the "voice of the earth and the wind" ('The Last Song'). The story has a folk-tale conclusion: "Thus on a cold December night in a remote village, an old storyteller gathers the young of the land around the leaping flames of the hearth and squats on the bare earth among them to pass on the story of that Black Sunday when a young and beautiful singer sang her last song even as one more Naga village began weeping for her ravaged and ruined children."

"Memory", as Temsula Ao says, "is a tricky thing: it picks and chooses what to preserve and what to discard". Therefore, it cannot record events chronologically like a historian , but can recreate impressions of events that have left their indelible marks on the people's psyche. This is not the place to enter into the debate on the complex relationship between history and memory. But, it has been agreed upon by many scholars on the subject that when formal historiography has failed to address the painful events that tell the story of a people's resistance against a dominant, omnipresent state, then collective memory plays a crucial role. The Naga struggle for self-determination which began soon after India's independence from colonial rule, involved the aspirations of a whole generation of people living in the eastern periphery of India, to live together with dignity according to their own traditional ideas of the "Naga way of life". But, in this , they encountered the opposition of the Indian Government which initially sought to crush the movement ruthlessly with the help of the army which was empowered with the Armed Forces Special Powers Act. The stories in this anthology are about the transformation of the very "Naga way-of-life" for which the people had struggled, during the course of the long-drawn battle waged in the remotest corners of the hills. They tell us about the sudden overturning of the quiet lives of the villagers in the wake of the violent events of the fifties and the sixties of the last century. It was then that a new vocabulary came into existence in the Naga languages with the induction of alien words like "curfew", "convoy", "grouping", "rebel" and "situation" —words which acquired "sinister dimensions" in the context of the struggle('Soaba'). Not only that, the traditional structures of the society were disturbed with the creation of a totally new class of people who inhabited the dangerous area "between trust and betrayal" ('The Curfew Man') —the army contractors , suppliers and informers , some of whom amassed a lot of wealth in shady deals which enabled them to afford lavish life-styles in the towns. But, there were others like Setemba, Soaba and Jemtila who became unwitting victims of the new system.

Not all the stories are about pain and suffering. There are tales that tell of the unsung heroism of common people who play their roles quietly in the struggle ('The Jungle Major'), of old heroes who remember their painful past and try to justify their actions to their grandchildren, and there are the stories about how the people continued to live their lives creatively against all odds ('The Pot Maker', 'The Journey', 'A New Chapter').

From the secure middle-class existence where poets can afford to sing of daffodils, she has taken a leap into the very vortex of a people's struggle.■

Tilottama Misra is Professor of English, Dibrugarh University, Assam.



characterize it as such or not), is an integral part of the contemporary globalization process. Indeed, opening up to FDI and privatization of state-owned enterprises is an integral part of the structural adjustment programme and conditionalities of the IMF (enthusiastically endorsed and supported by the World Bank).

Similarly, the claim that MNCs increase employment in host countries is a truism and hence misleading. Indeed, any industrial or service enterprise, whatever the nature of its ownership, increases employment, *ceteris paribus*. The Fund-Bank typically characterize state-owned enterprises (SOEs) as "overstaffed", thus even by their own admission, whatever the other problems with state ownership might be, failure to generate employment is not one of them. The correct way of framing the question ought to be in terms of opportunity costs (how alternative patterns of ownership of enterprises compare on the employment generation front). The decade of the 1990s (and beyond) in India has been the decade of liberalization, privatization *and* the decade of jobless growth. In the history of independent India, this decade has also seen the greatest entry of MNCs and a marked reduction in the role of the public sector. While detailed empirical research tracing exact causations between these factors continues, there seems to be evidence in support of the view that MNCs may not be driven by the objective of employment generation. A counter question could be: why should MNCs be bothered about the larger problem of employment generation in the host country? That is something that host country governments ought to worry about. However, if unemployment rises in any country, it is an economic cost, a social problem, and most of all, it raises the question of "development for whom"? Moreover, if increasing the presence of MNCs in the Southern countries becomes a compulsion, the other side of which is a curtailment of state intervention in the economy (via IMF dictated conditionalities), then host country governments lose precious degrees of freedom to deal with unemployment, the severity of the problem being particularly sharp in heavily populated countries like India and China.

Race to the top?: Through the fleeting reference to the "race-to-the-top" claim, Bhagwati touches upon a highly controversial issue (one that he does not explore adequately) that divides even the anti-globalizers, particularly the labour movements of the North and the South, where the Northern labour movements have much more in common with their own governments. This is the "social clause" issue that is seen by the labour movements in the South as essentially a protectionist measure. The trade unions in the North support it, as they are grappling with unemployment in their own countries and often see outsourcing as responsible for their increasing unemployment. Munck (*Globalisation and Labour*) and Steger deal with the complexity of this debate, with the former supporting a universalist argument in favour of globally desirable uniform labour standards. In theory, "good" labour standards are absolutely welcome, but again the real question is how to deal with disparities in labour standards between countries that are very disparate in their stages of development. The disparity is not only in stages of development but also in terms of sovereignty over economic policies. The countries that are supposed to make the transition to better labour standards have very few policy alternatives available to experiment with. Thus, while everyone agrees that child labour is despicable and must be eliminated, the real question is how best to achieve this. Boycotting products made by child labour is good for the conscience of the consumers, but if compelling poverty pushes children to work when they should be in school, then any solution eventually has to confront this reality head-on and removal of products made with child labour outside the purview of the international trade regime precisely does not do that. Also, as GATT transformed into the WTO, several issues (intellectual property rights, for instance) were brought under the purview of international negotiations. One of the several objections to the introduction of the social clause is that it gives further sanction to this process and legitimizes the international (read developed country) take-over of an issue that ought to be under the purview of national policy making.

Women and the globalized labour force: Feminization of the labour force as a feature of contemporary globalization provides the backdrop to a large volume of research on gender inequality in labour markets across the world. Some see it as a welcome change, arguing that it shifts the balance in favour of women; the feminist critique challenges it powerfully. The first question is empirical: to what extent are labour markets getting feminized? The more important part of the critique targets the changes unleashed by feminization (flexible, part-time employment for women, or long hours of work, weakening of labour laws, informalization of labour markets) as undesirable or actually strengthening rather than weakening the gendered nature of labour markets. Bhattacharya (edited), Dasgupta (edited) and Munck examine the different facets of changing gender relations under globalization, most not favourable to empowerment of women, with Bhagwati providing the counter point.

White collar crimes: There are several facets to the critique of MNC operations in the developing countries that go beyond their labour practices. Bhagwati himself notes a few of these: political intrusion in host countries, disregard to safety laws and so forth. Vergese Chiryath and Ernest De Zolt in Samir Dasgupta edited volume (*Changing Face of Globalization*) document and analyse "white collar crimes" committed by MNCs in the South. They discuss, in detail, three (in)famous cases: that of unethical practices of 33 MNCs in the context of infant formula distribution and sale in developing countries, the disregard to safety regulations resulting in the Union Carbide tragedy in India and financial bungling and deliberate misinformation by Enron and the uncertain future of the Dabhol power plant, linked to their proximity to Dick Cheney, as a result of the bankruptcy of the parent company. In the first case, infant formula was aggressively marketed as indispensable for healthy babies with the knowledge that in the poorer developing countries, mothers will tend to stretch the formula by thinning it (thus destroying its efficacy) and/or use contaminated water, resulting in diarrohea and death. In the second case, during 1980-84, Union Carbide cut its workforce into half as a part of cost-cutting measures and used untrained labour to deal with dangerous pesticides, resulting in the poisonous gas leak that killed and maimed thousands. The third case is a clear case of financial bungling where the company deliberately overestimated its earnings, forced employees to buy company stocks, kept losses off its balance sheets by showing partnerships with dummy companies and top executives cashed in their stocks just before the company filed for bankruptcy. These cases demonstrate the several ways in which MNCs, through sheer economic might, indulge in a variety of unethical practices, mocking international systems of governance and jurisprudence.

There is no alternative (TINA): The argument that contemporary globalization is indispensable for development is fallacious for

The decade of the 1990s (and beyond) in India has been the decade of liberalization, privatization *and* the decade of jobless growth. In the history of independent India, this decade has also seen the greatest entry of MNCs and a marked reduction in the role of the public sector. While detailed empirical research tracing exact causations between these factors continues, there seems to be evidence in support of the view that MNCs may not be driven by the objective of employment generation.

several reasons. One, the gains of "development" are distributed increasingly asymmetrically: income inequalities are increasing, rather than decreasing, both within and across countries. Second, taking a more historical view (Bagchi in Bhattacharya edited, and the various essays in K.S. Jomo edited), we learn that the rules of the game were different in the previous century when the world was just as globalized, if not more. For instance, free trade is advocated as a desirable policy for developing countries for its presumed unequivocal benefits; however, in the imperialist globalization of the previous century, the present day rich countries practised its exact opposite, viz., protectionism. Lest it be argued that this simply reflects changing material conditions, it would be well to recall that even in the previous century, while the industrializing nations extolled the virtues of laissez faire, they themselves chose not to practise it. This habit of not practising what one preaches remains true even today as the rich countries retain substantial protectionist controls, despite the rhetoric of opening up that dominates international discourses. Also, while they vociferously champion opening-up for capital flows, the rich countries do not extend the argument to advocate liberalization of international labour flows; indeed, debates around international migration are marked by the most vicious racist and xenophobic outpourings.

Also, one of the outcomes of the globalization process is the increasing homogenization of policy space (what Ha-Joon Chang elsewhere has called the shrinking of policy space). Thus, the no-alternative theory becomes almost self-fulfilling as countries are unable to devise alternative policy responses due to pressures from multilateral institutions. It is noteworthy, however, that sometimes when countries do deviate from conventional wisdom (as Malaysia did by retaining capital controls), they actually fare better. This is not an absolutist argument: domestic ruling classes have their own compulsions of retaining power and thus, it is highly likely that domestic 'independent' policies are just as anti-development as those imposed by the international economic order. However, in this event, democracy and mass mobilization allow for popular censure of national governments; externally dictated anti-development agendas are much more difficult to dislodge.

Clash of civilizations, the Arab world: Reactions to this homogenization, as much cultural as it is economic, have been diverse. Roy discusses the Arab/Islamic responses, as does Wallerstein in Dasgupta (edited), passionately debated under the clash of civilization thesis. The western discourse on Islam or Arab culture (not synonymous, but used interchangeably) is an oversimplified one. As Edward Said has argued persuasively, like all cultures, "Islam contains within itself currents and counter-currents"; however, the western world likes to portray an anti-western, anti-democratic, terrorist image of the Islamic world that ought to be an object of fear and hostility. It thus ignores the variety and differences within this world and chooses to overlook the fact that no religion is democratic. Also, for instance, in Jordan, Yemen, Kuwait and Lebanon, Islamists have openly participated in elections. Interestingly, while denouncing Islamic extremism, the Americans have openly sided with and supported the most reactionary and regressive regimes, including the Saudi regime. In several instances, like the Taliban in Afghanistan, the Americans supported fundamentalist outfits in their own fight against Soviet or left-wing forces. Thus, the so-called clash is more imaginary than real; while undoubtedly some regimes are deeply fundamentalist and anti-democratic, the hypocrisy of American (read western) policy towards Islamic states is clear: countries on the international "hate list" (the so-called axis of evil or rogue states) are not necessarily those that are the most fundamentalist. Also, blatant falsehoods (like the existence of the weapons of mass destruction in Iraq) are used as a basis for waging war against countries the American regime chooses to hate, and this further strengthens the fundamentalist sections of the Islamic world. In the end, this is the classic diversionary tactic: whipping up a hysteria of fear against an anti-modern, anti-progress, anti-democratic demon (doesn't matter if it is real or not) helps the Bush and Blair regimes and their clones divert attention from their own glaring failures in solving problems of development in their own countries.

China: One important experience that gets insufficient attention in this collection is that of China that consistently confounds stereotypes. In terms of material progress and a rise in the standard of living for the majority, its achievements are undisputed. What is debatable is the extent to which its success can be explained by adherence to an alternative development strategy, the leadership of the communist party notwithstanding. Nayar traces the extraordinary growth trajectory of the Chinese economy and it is clear that market orientation has been a clear factor in this strategy. However, he points out that it has also been easier for China to pursue several independent policies because of its sheer size and its tremendous geo-political importance. Also, it is clear that the Chinese state is not interested in supporting revolutionary or rebellious groups anywhere in the world and is mainly concerned with furthering its self interest, even if it means a partnership with the Americans. He analyses the "de-facto Sino-US alliance" that got briefly ruptured in the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square incident but has resurfaced. Unfortunately, thus the Chinese case supports the no-alternative theory more than the case against it, even though its policies and interactions with the international economy are driven by pragmatism, rather than by ideology. However, protest and rebellion against the inequalities generated by the development process is mounting inside the country and which way it will shift the policy focus is a moot point.

On the whole, this is a diverse collection of books, both in terms of ideological orientation and target audiences. For instance, the Cullenberg and Pattanaik reader is very interesting as the various essays consider the limits to markets and market-based rationality (for instance, trade in human organs or Kanbur's discussion of obnoxious markets); however, it speaks a different language and does not really fit in neatly with the other books in the collection. Similarly, the Gupta et al collection focuses on globalization, identity politics and social conflicts, with essays on certain literary texts, thus, again remaining slightly peripheral to the other books.

Going through this collection, one realized, once again, the importance of lucid writing laced with simple facts, if one's arguments are to reach a wide audience. Thus, despite deep disagreements with it, one found Bhagwati's book the easiest to read since the arguments were neatly presented and it had the right blend of text and figures. Some of the other texts, while making the "right" arguments, unfortunately were much more obscure and often had no figures/data to support their claim: thus clearly they were talking to the already converted. Given the enormity of the battle on globalization, this kind of writing is hardly likely to aid the cause of the anti-globalization movement, as it is unlikely to attract even the fence-sitters and will, in fact, give additional ammunition to its detractors.■

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That Noble Dream of Somewhere Else

Prasanta Chakravarty

THE GLOBALIZATION DECADE: A CRITICAL READER
Edited By Leo Panitch, Colin Leys, Alan Zuege and Martin Konings
Aakar Books, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 325, Rs. 750.00

MODERNITY, GLOBALIZATION AND IDENTITY: TOWARD A REFLEXIVE QUEST
By Avijit Pathak
Aakar Books, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 175, Rs. 125.00

THE COLLAPSE OF GLOBALISM AND THE REINVENTION OF THE WORLD
By John Ralston Saul
Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 309, Rs. 395.00

Globalization has become a catchall phrase for the past two decades. Economists, political scientists and cultural critics alike have described the phenomenon of globalization in many different ways. The three works under review try to confront the issue and propose alternative approaches to living.

The globalization reader has been assembled largely by the editors of the *Socialist Register*, one of the foremost left academic journals published from North America. Consequently, the theoretical framework of the analysts is Marxian. But in keeping with the best traditions of the new left, there have been two departures: one, since the subject at hand is globalization, the emphasis is more on relations of production rather than on forces of production. In fact, the whole production question is kept at bay by concentrating more on issues of exchange and commodification in relation to globalization. The contributors emphasize *ad nauseum* that their location of investigation is primarily political rather than economic, although most of them deal with a certain kind of a post-Keynesian economic model that contemporary forces of globalization pursue.

The second important trope that marks these essays is an insistence on the nation/state as the terrain of the political. The objective is to move beyond the disembodied versions of pure economic and technological globalization and foreground the issue of political choice, especially accounting for domestic policy making at the level of the state. Consequently, the authors analyse the erosion of autonomous domestic bases of accumulation and nationalist forces and the concomitant transformation of the structures of political representation within the state. The authors emphasize that the nation states have increasingly abandoned their former role as a welfare body that used to take its social responsibilities seriously. This is what the editors, in their introductory note, call the 'internationalization of the state'. This entails a reordering of the different governmental departments in favour of mediating relations with the world economy at the cost of overlooking its primary assignments of education, public health, employment, social services and so forth. This leads to a fragmentation of the state, linked with the rise of trans-governmental regulatory networks. International competitiveness and its demands regulate the various branches of the state. The nation state is not withering away. Far from it, the state constantly makes important policy choices—economic and social—and reorients the society in a certain direction. The issues of globalization then have to be negotiated first at the political level and the challenges to a neoliberal 'lifestyle' too must also be primarily political.

In his tone setting piece 'Globalization and the State', Leo Panitch reminds us that the centralization and concentration of state powers are necessary prerequisites for a global market discipline. The general macroeconomic orchestration of the state, what Panitch calls the economic *res publica*, has been now directed solely to strengthen individual and the national capital by reproducing the patterns of global capital flow. Taking Nicos Poulantzas, Robin Murray and Robert Cox as harbingers who anticipated such internationalization of the state, Panitch deduces that the new order is witnessing a transformation, not a dimunition of the state. Besides, such mediation of the untrammelled logic of international market competitiveness by the state within its own domain cannot just be ideological, now that the Cold War is over. Rather the logic of such acute possessive individualism is being constantly legalized and given a constitutional status. It is here that the coercive nature of the state becomes glaringly raw. Panitch then goes on to critique the progressive competitive alternative or state capitalism, whereby labour and the state are urged to wrest the initiative from the global corporations and transnational capital and run towards competitive success. First of all, that would be an ethical defeat, to accept the logic of world market as the ultimate determinant of development and political maturity. Second, such a picture of perfect competition is unrealistic since certain parties will always have a competitive advantage over the smaller frys owing to their financial and military reach. Citing Northern Europe as an example that has been trying to follow such a moderate social democratic model, Panitch says that eventually it is being gobbled up by the American capital that never stands outside Europe.

The goal should be the transformation of the state rather than transcending it. That transformation must always be tied to the fact that the state does not relinquish its primary *raison de etre* of guiding the economic *res publica*, in other words, not overlook the public political nature of its existence. One has to be careful here though, so that the right wing nationalists do not hijack such intervention at the state level. Panitch goes on to support the break up of an existing state, which he says might be international rearticulation of sovereignty through creation of regional federations. Above all, resistance to the global market order must come from an alternative state that is guided by a "…more inwardly oriented economy rather than driven by external trade considerations." Panitch concludes his article by *hoping* for a series of such alternative state movements, in unison, that would eventually tumble down the present global order.

Manfred Bienefeld addresses the nature and quality of life that globalization destabilizes. From Cornelius Castoriadis's and Claude Lefort's *Socialism or Barbarism* movement, he takes the metaphor of barbarism and applies it to explain the clinical and efficient subtext of the globalized world. Such barbaric ideology encourages the view that individuals cannot have self-interested reasons to be concerned about their fellow citizens, that it is fruitless to live in harmony with nature, that working in less stressful and interesting jobs violate the culture of work ethic and that social and cultural pursuits are luxuries that can wait. Bienefeld offers a resolution by way of positive nationalism bereft of jingoism and racial fanaticism. The first marker to such nationalism is for people to define themselves in terms of social beings and as responsible citizens. Such socialization of the individual can happen from within the existing territorial states. The next step is to include people in discussing policy issues. There should remain a constant bargaining process between people and the actual policy makers. Bienefeld however, does not explicate how such a notion of positive nationhood can be actualized.

Another interesting piece is by Wally Seccombe who posits that contemporary shareholder capitalism, with its thrust on hedonism, undermines long term obligations to one's partner, parents and children, that endures

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families, provides support and binds generations. In yet another powerful essay, Elmar Altvater busts the myth of perpetual growth and shows that the bubble is bound to burst owing to economic, financial, ecological and social limits. There needs to be paradigmatic shift in economic policy making that looks beyond growth as the panacea to poverty and chronic unemployment.

Part of the problem with this anthology is that many of the essays simply replicate the issues at hand and provide similar kind of solutions. And such solutions revolve around political and social control of the circulation of global capital, which means a protectionist macroeconomic policy, tax regulation, resisting direct investment and regulating trade and financial capital flows. Financial capital is to be subjected to state controls on debt payment and capital mobility. New forms of investment planning and collective bargaining norms are to be implemented. Such inward oriented economic policy has been practised before and has an equal probability of backfiring on the very human values that the authors cherish and uphold. The other contradiction lies in the attitude of the writers towards the Keynesian approach. While there is a general unease towards celebrating the social democratic model of the welfare state, one detects a tremendous nostalgia for such a 'world that is lost' and a sense of solidarity with the nationalists. The authors realize probably that the 'nationalist bourgeoisie' were at least sometimes fellow travellers in the realm of culture and politics, which the rentier capitalists cannot be, what with their utter crassness and mediocrity in both these spheres.

One important divergence that goes beyond statist responses is to question the politics of allocation of work time which needs to be decreased across the board in order to thwart alienation and provide more time for social interaction and community work. The other area worth musing is on alternative employment schemes so that the idea of skill is not dictated purely in terms of utilitarian standards. Unlike stringent control, these are positive and constructive alternatives to the economic rationalism of the Hobbesian variety. However, there is an idiom of hope that sifts through the anthology which testifies to the fact that indeed, it is not the end of history as promised by certain right Hegelians.

In *Modernity, Globalization and Identity*, Avijit Pathak assails the three subject heads in India as a cultural problem. Pathak begins with the issue of modernity in India, which he rightly analyses as a sensibility—fostered by a critical consciousness, dynamism, individuation and democratization—rather than as a western import. However, the tropes of scientific objectivity, universalism and progress that modernity also celebrates often gives rise to cultural arrogance, hyper-masculinity and alienation. Besides, modernity, by its insistence on uncertainty and flux also nurtures a sense of homelessness. Pathak responds by asserting that science cannot be eradicated and relativism or nativism established instead. Rather it is desirable to back cross-cultural dialogue between the traditional and the modern. Instead of nurturing closed and arrogant mindsets, both sides must understand that it is a two-way, symbiotic process that would create a better world: " It is important to create a world in which a scientist and a mystic, an engineer and a poet, a modern physician and a traditional healer co-exist, and enrich one another." Pathak's project is to soften modernity.

Moving on to the domain of cultural globalization, Pathak considers that despite its overcoming of geographical barriers, culture remains remarkably resilient and entrenched. Besides, this interaction of cultures is not necessarily a symmetrical one and is often characterized by domination—"…the West seeking to dominate the East or the Hindus trying to 'integrate' the tribals into their own fold." However, culture is also an area where one can creatively experiment and protest against such domination.

Pathak reflects on this unevenness in the transaction of cultural artifacts across borders, but goes on to assert that instead of protectionism one must still insist on dialogue and reciprocity. However, he does not tell us how such a sense of noble reciprocity will help numb the built-in asymmetry that remain within the present global order. One of his solutions is to merge the local and the global, patriotism and cosmopolitanism, but there is no analysis of how such a fusion will be effected. This is partly because Pathak does not take into account the political and economic spheres that are intricately linked with the culture question.

Finally, Pathak embarks on identity formation in India. Although dealing with identity issues is important, needless political correctness, he feels, leads to exclusivism. Too much reliance on one's culture, caste or class leads to hostility towards those who do not have similar identity. Identity formation also ignores the similarity of experience among various social groups. Besides, identity politics fragments itself and becomes self-defeating. The emancipatory urge to liberate marginalized communities from stigmatized identities and create a just society often leads to issues of historically imposed identity in a politically instrumental fashion: " Identity politics, paradoxically, reinforces the same identity it seeks to transcend." Identity politics dictates; it does not want to broaden its horizon.

There is clearly a liberal zing in the general tenor of the arguments. But such a variety of liberalism is evasive and pragmatic. It wishes away the complexities of identity politics, the deep-rooted cultural and political bargaining that India undergoes everyday. Instead of meeting headlong, such an approach also looks askance at the global power structures. There is a remarkable sense of wishing away the conflictual and celebration of a premature consensus. That is a noble chimera. One expects a much more nuanced approach from a seasoned social scientist like Pathak who has been, we know, trying to create an alternative trope in his own institutional space for years now.

We can excuse Pathak for being an armchair liberal, but not for advancing the kind of spiritualism that he calls an alternative mode of living. Although Pathak insists time and again that the critique of modernity should not be allowed to be hijacked by the revivalists and that it begins with humility, he soon falls into a similar trap: he commemorates affective individualism. He spells out early that his project is to spiritualize modernity. From then on his heroes are Aurobindo and a certain interpretation of Gandhi—who Pathak thinks, uses the "…higher ideal of calmness, inner transformation and spiritual evolution." Among other things, Pathak buttresses his case with poetry—*sui generis* a domain of affectivity and emotions! The result is that he ends up citing uncritically from English romantic poetry. He clubs Wordsworth, Shelley and Blake making no room for the profound and intricate differences among them in matters of poetic sensibility, political position and philosophy. This is shoddy interdisciplinary work.

The next step from individual spiritual awakening is obvious: "the experience of a collective ecstasy" and "a deep/intimate experience of oneness: the experience that leads one to understand the suffering of the next-door neighbour." The kind of liberalism that Pathak upholds is laudable—creating a social environment where differences are not allowed to become hierarchical and upholding a shared public sphere. But could that sense of cultural and political space be reached by cultivating

merely sensitivity and empathy? And what are the salient features of such a sensibility? That is the domain of continental phenomenology and monist cultural thought—not objective sociology.

Affectivity and aesthetization of culture and politics are returning in social sciences in an interesting way. The domain of experience can be an important tool against various forms of hegemony, but such an apparatus must be handled with utmost care or else it will invariably lead to a sociology of the essential individual and a dangerous politics of cultural consensus and timelessness.

In spite of some significant lacuna, Pathak's defending the cosmopolitanism, cultural differences and his steadfast negation of crass political correctness must be acclaimed. And Pathak's strongest point is his lucidity, a fast vanishing quality among social scientists.

In *Collapse of Globalism and the Reinvention of the World*, John Ralston Saul makes an important distinction between commercialism and capitalism. He contends that a constant surplus of goods at a certain level relates neither to wealth creation nor with structural investment. The idea of perfect competition is overstated. To the disadvantage of real entrepreneurs, the current neo-liberal economic rationalism strengthens private sector technologies in large corporations, weakens governments, discourages taxes on the top bracket of earners and forces deregulation.

However, there is a curious paradox in Saul. He censures John Rawls for advancing a theory of contracts (making no distinction between the legalistic early Rawls and the mature Rawls of *Political Liberalism*) that actually strengthens utilitarianism and libertinism, but at the same time as an answer to such skewed commercialism, he revisits Adam Smith, Toqueville, Lorenzetti and Cicero—figures who develop an idea of *vita activa civilis*, democracy and genuine choice. In other words, he wishes to bring back the political and the ethical in capitalist ventures. In fact Saul argues for a return to the humanist idea of equilibrium, where economic enterprise was built over public good—on Peace, Fortitude, Prudence, Magnanimity, Temperance and Justice. Saul however, does not discuss in practical details how such equilibrium can be reached in the present economic world. One wonders whether Saul forgets that the ideal of civic republicanism which he is backing has been no less expansionist and militaristic than the current neo-con adventures around the world. One has to just take a look at Niccolo Machiavelli's *Discourses on Livy* and James Harrington's *Oceana* in order to see how a politically democratic domestic policy might have a concomitant exapansionist component of the commonwealth. Nor can one overlook the feudal excesses of the classical liberals. What was a subtext in Locke's *Second Treatise of Civil Government* got practical scaffolding in his investment in the English slave trade through the Royal Africa Company and in his drafting the *Fundamental Constitutions of the Carolinas*, which granted the owners absolute power over slaves. Modern libertarian trade and commerce is indebted to Locke for a simple dictum: land must be enclosed and harnessed even if it is necessary to eliminate a whole people.

John Ralston Saul actually has a chapter on India and China where he concludes that both the countries are practising a multipolar foreign policy that would eventually help destabilize crass commercialism that the US exports. Given the current tendencies of the great Indian middle class and the policy makers, such optimism sounds a bit premature. It is here that Saul and the contributors to the critical reader both sing in unison a rhetoric of hope for a more just and egalitarian future. But that possibility of renewal is dependent on our ability to make the right choices in the interregnum—both at the state and the individual level. In other words, to use a classic civic humanist trope: *Occasione* must be seized by her forelock since she is tonsured and cannot be taken by the short hairs behind.■

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Twists and Turns of Development Discourse

Praveen Jha

THE NEW DEVELOPMENT ECONOMICS AFTER THE WASHINGTON CONSENSUS
Edited by K.S. Jomo and Ben Fine
Tulika Books and Zed Books, 2006, pp. xxiv+304, Rs. 650.00

The volume under review is part of a trilogy aimed at offering a glimpse of an extremely rich legacy of the ideas and discourses on economic development, from a whole range of heterodox perspectives, as distinct from the mainstream neoclassical tradition. The other two volumes were reviewed in an earlier issue of this journal*, and the context of the trilogy and its tremendous usefulness were highlighted in that review. The present piece focuses specifically on the main concern of the third volume.

The central concern of the volume under review here is the twists and turns in development discourses since the early 1980s, when *Laissez Faire* conservation started becoming ascendant globally as a counter-revolution against the 'old' development economics, although there are a couple of chapters dealing with other issues as well. Apart from the introductory note, there are fourteen substantive chapters. These essays, taken together, provide an extremely illuminating exchange not only with the neoclassical/neoliberal economic orthodoxy that came to the known as the 'Washington Consensus', but also with the so-called 'Post-Washington Consensus' of the mainstream tradition.

The backdrop for the emergence of the Washington Consensus is well-known. However, a few words may be in order here to recall the key elements that contributed to the social backdrop. Consequent to the oil price hike of the early 1970s (and later again towards the end of '70s), economics in the western world suffered substantial slowdowns; furthermore, the oil price hike came at a time when these economies were already towards the tail-end of the post-World War II boom and the emergence of stagflation was causing much consternation among economic pundits. As regards the developing world, in spite of respectable economic progress in the post-World War II era, it continued to suffer from high levels of poverty and other development deficits, and a large number of countries appeared to be on the downslide. In short, the global economy seemed mired in a variety of problems, and the time was ripe for the neoliberal orthodoxy, panting for revenge since its comprehensive drubbing by the heterodox tradition in the 1950s and '60s, to strike back.

These caricatures and strawmen of the ideas from the 'old' development economics were constructed and easily rubbished, and ideologies like Deepak Lal, Anne Krueger, among others, were annointed as high priests/ priestesses of the counter-revolution. Keynesianism was demonized and in terms of policy prescriptions, it was a throw-back to the crude 'Says Law' and 'efficient invisible hand' kind of arguments; the moment of glory for the supply-side economics and market fundamentalism was back. Wholehearted support from Thatcher and Reagan governments to begin with, and the reluctant acquiescence of Social Democratic Governments in Europe along with, and partly in the wake of, the crumbling of state socialism in the erstwhile Soviet Union and elsewhere, provided 'official' sanctity and helped consolidation of the neoliberal tide: the kick of triumphalism was such that the authors like Francis Fukayama proclaimed that the history had reached its glorious end!

"One-size-fits all" was the centre-piece of the Washington Consensus as it came into being, and market fundamentalism was supposed to have universal relevance. But soon after the ascendancy of the neo-liberal orthodoxy, voices from within the mainstream tradition started raising murmurs about the efficacy of the policy package that went in the name of the Consensus, and by the late 1990s, many influential economists from within these tradition had openly begun questioning it. As the editors of the volume under review here put it, 'Few, however, would now openly attach themselves to the original versions and policies of the Washington Consensus…And, on a higher analytical plane, commitment to the virtues of the market has made way for a more nuanced comprehension of how the market does or does not work, and of the complementary role of non-market factors. In its own technical fashion, development economics has restored some multi-disciplinarity, although it is limited relative to the inter-disciplinary political economy of the pre-Washington Consensus' (p ix).

Among the most prominent economists within the neo-classical tradition, who became trenchant critics of the Washington Consensus, is Joseph Stiglitz, former senior Vice-President and the Chief Economist at the World Bank, who announced in 1998 that a 'post Washington Consensus' had already emerged, based on important developments in micro-economic theory. Although, whether there is something called the 'post Washington Consensus' at all is debatable, it is important to recognize that Stiglitz's contributions, along with those of many fellow economists, are of far-reaching significance in exposing the vacuity of the claims advanced by the Washington Consensus or its close variants. Theoretical contributions built on new micro foundations using assumptions such as imperfect information, missing markets, etc. and their consequences, bring to the fore a variety of market and institutional failures, and seek to establish conceptual frameworks where with the state and market have their respective roles for Stiglitz, (along with many others), such efforts constitute what has come to be known as New Development Economics.

The basic claim of the volume under review here is that the so-called New Development Economics (or what one of the editors, Ben Fine prefers to christen as Newer Development Economics), though a welcome significant advance over market fundamentalists in terms of its theoretical moorings, does not travel the distance adequately. As Ben Fine puts it: 'Although, to some extent through its own prism of market imperfections, it returns to and retrieves the classics and the mere statist approach to development that preceded the Washington Consensus, it also embraces and extends the scope of mainstream economics in understanding the nature of development. Fundamentally, the newer development economics continues to proceed on the basis of optimizing, if imperfectly informed, individuals, located within axiomatic models without social and historical content and context…As such, it is essentially incapable of satisfactorily incorporating, at the outset, the social and historical structures, processes and agencies that comprise the key determinants and characteristics of development, and that constituted the concern of classical development economics and its predecessors in classical political economy.' (p xviii)

The chapters in the volume substantiate such a claim concretely and very competently, by examining specific themes such as agriculture, new growth theory and a range of other topics. All the contributions are of very high caliber, well written. Taken together, these essays provide one of the few critical and scholarly surveys of the New Development Economics and should be of great interest across disciplines in the social sciences.■

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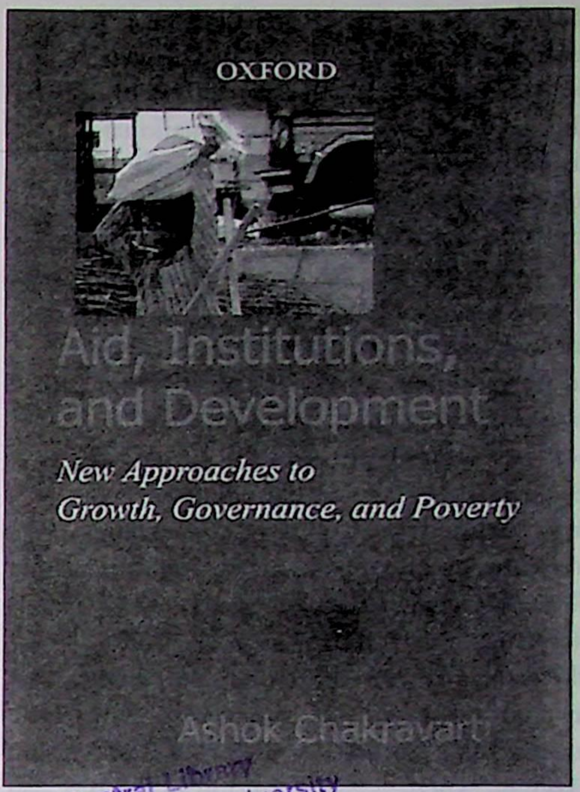
* *The Book Review*, Vol. XXX, Nos.1-2, January-February 2006, p. 17.

Poverty and Governance

Satish K. Jain

AID, INSTITUTIONS AND DEVELOPMENT: NEW APPROACHES TO GROWTH, GOVERNANCE, AND POVERTY
By Ashok Chakravarti
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 190, Rs. 550.00

HANDBOOK OF POVERTY IN INDIA: PERSPECTIVES, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMMES
Edited by R. Radhakrishna and Shovan Ray
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2005, pp. xxv+185, Rs. 650.00



Chakravarti's work is concerned with the efficacy of aid for development and with the relationship between institutions and development. The author is of the view that aid has not been an effective instrument for bringing about economic and social change in the developing world. According to him aid has had a weak impact on key macro-economic, institutional and governance-related variables; and has been a waste of scarce resources. He does not favour public expenditure on poverty reduction programmes; because according to him development and poverty reduction are a consequence of good governance, not of targeted schemes to help the poor, and that larger governments have serious negative effects on growth. The key to economic development, he says, lies in releasing the productive energies of individuals and organizations; which according to him means that private investment, both domestic and foreign, must be facilitated and encouraged. He opines that economic growth requires the elimination of distortions, market and institutional development, and the pursuit of good macro-economic policies; and therefore concludes that the objectives of structural adjustment continue to be valid. While favouring conditionality-based approach to engage developing countries, he stresses that it needs to be more binding on developing countries.

On the basis of review of literature and his understanding of the relationship between aid and development on the one hand and growth and market oriented-institutions on the other he makes several recommendations. The most important of these recommendations, made more or less throughout the book, calls for greater intrusiveness on the part of developed countries in the affairs of developing countries. On page 84 he says: 'for aid to be effective, there has to be an attempt to influence the underlying political and institutional forces, and that it is impossible for donors not to play a political or at least quasi-political role in a recipient country.'. He stresses that the donor community needs to reorient its thinking towards persuading, educating and, where necessary, putting appropriate pressure on developing countries so that the necessary reforms and policies for sustainable development are implemented. In this connection he writes approvingly of the Millennium Challenge Account of the U.S. government; and calls it a pathbreaking approach to aid and development. He is full of praise for USAID-administered programmes. He writes: 'During the 1990s, increasing awareness amongst donors of the critical importance of political and institutional factors for the success of aid resulted in several of them introducing programmes to deal with problems of governance and political reform. While several donors now implement such programmes, there is only one donor to date which has translated this understanding into a systematic and key component of its aid programme.

This is the US government through its USAID-administrated Democracy and Governance and Office of Transitional Initiatives (OTI) programmes. Of course, non-reform-minded governments can hardly be expected to endorse such initiatives. On the contrary, such approaches will be strongly opposed as transgressions of national sovereignty and denounced as unwarranted interference in the internal affairs of a country' (p. 84). He is highly critical of international law which in his opinion gives too much importance to outdated concepts like national sovereignty.

He suggests abolition of multilateral organizations like the United Nations Development Programme(UNDP), the UN Department for Economic and Social Development (UNDESD), the UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the International Trade Centre (ITC), the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the International Labour Organization (ILO). A remarkable aspect of this book is the asymmetry in application of various concepts to the contexts of developing and developed countries. In the opinion of the author one cannot expect governments of developing countries to work in the interest of peoples of these countries; as in all likelihood rent-seeking behaviour would be followed by the government officials. Some who take a somewhat narrow view of individual rationality might even agree with this viewpoint. But the author does not apply the same conception of rationality to government officials of the developed world. One can surmise from his repeated pleas for intrusive actions by developed countries in the affairs of developing countries that he must be of the opinion that the government officials of developed countries would work in the interests of the peoples of developing countries. Thus it would appear that the only way to make any sense out of this book is to introduce a postulate that the officials of developed countries who deal with developing countries are altruistic in nature and consequently constitute exceptions to the usual assumption made in economics that individuals are rational and self-interested. In this connection it is important to note that although the author has an extraordinary thesis that people in developing countries are predatory and that the capitalist institutions of impersonal interaction and exchange encourage human beings to act in a less predatory and more self-interested yet benign manner (p. 91), from this alone it would be impossible to argue that officials of rich countries would work in the interest of the peoples of poor countries, it being impossible to equate self-interested yet benign behaviour with altruism. With respect to violations of human rights and draconian laws a similar asymmetry is exhibited. Mozambique, for some strange reason, comes in for severe criticism and is described in terms akin to a criminalized state. Guantanamo is conspicuous by not getting any mention. While laws and procedures of several countries are denounced, there is not a word about the Patriot Act.

The following statement of the author would probably make some to sit up and reflect on the dissipation of the ideas and values which

made freedom struggles and liberation movements possible: 'Even worse, by denouncing as neo-imperialist any 'intrusive' efforts by more enlightened sections of the international community to deal with such regimes, many such groups end up becoming party to the repression themselves' (p. 157).

The Handbook of Poverty in India edited by Radhakrishna and Ray mainly deals with various aspects of poverty alleviation policies and programmes. The coverage of governance related matters is quite detailed. Parts of the book are informative and well written. There are, however, parts which are difficult to comprehend. The chapter on Institutional Interventions (Ch. 3) is particularly difficult to follow. Most of the chapter is devoted to discussing three-phase process of poverty reduction. The presentation is done in such a way that it does not become clear whether the process being discussed is a stylized description of Indian experience, description of the process that one can expect on theoretical grounds or description of some process that on normative grounds one could advocate. Assuming the chapter has some content, it is not at all easy to ferret it out.

Another difficulty for readers arises due to the presence in several places of statements which are or appear to be contradictory. On page 75 what is said about the PRIs in the left column is more or less negated in the right column. In Appendix 1.2 on Poverty and Deprivation among Scheduled Tribes in India there are statements regarding the average land size among STs such that it is difficult to see how they can be true together. First we have on page 23 the statement: 'Moreover, the average land size among them tends to be much lower and most of them belong to the category of marginal farmers.' But then on the next page we have: 'Hence, it can be found that the average size of landholding is higher and landlessness is lower among STs in comparison to other social groups.'

There are also some intriguing statements like the one on page 142: 'But the entrepreneurship development activities (of the SHGs and others) need to be qualitatively enriched so that poverty reduction will not be a transient phenomenon. In fact, this is one of the major challenges encountered by the voluntary sector also in their efforts to address poverty squarely.' One would have thought that the whole point of poverty reduction programmes was to reach a point of no poverty, making the poverty reduction necessarily a transient phenomenon. On page 70 we have: 'Currently, small and marginal holdings account for nearly 90 per cent of total holdings and nearly a half of the cultivated area. It would be a reasonable inference that landlessness is rising in agriculture.'

Now it could very well be true that landlessness is rising in agriculture; but how does one deduce it on the basis of distribution of land holdings at one particular point of time only? It is of some interest to note that on the question of non-growth interventions the conclusion reached in the handbook is quite different from that of Chakravarti's book. The handbook has the following to say: 'It is also evident that the pace of reduction of poverty has been slow during the 1990s despite high growth indicating that the link between economic growth and poverty is getting weakened. This warrants that future poverty reduction strategies should pay greater attention to non-growth interventions' (p. 161).■

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Riots Do Not Happen Accidentally

Dipankar Gupta

VOTES AND VIOLENCE: ELECTORAL COMPETITION AND COMMUNAL RIOTS IN INDIA
By Steven I. Wilkinson
Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004, pp.xiii+293, Rs. 375.00

RELIGIOUS POLITICS AND COMMUNAL VIOLENCE
Edited by Steven I. Wilkinson
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2005, pp.viii+446, Rs. 695.00

The truth is that all riots are sponsored by conspiracies and by instrumentalism of the grossest kind, and to get a measure of this one has to see a riot first hand or read between the lines of reports to get at the true picture.

Steven Wilkinson's erudition and expertise on the subject of communal and ethnic violence are truly admirable. His style and tone are almost self-effacing but he knows how to make a point and he makes them with emphasis and judgment. He first offers his readers a very charitable exposition of alternate points of view and then systematically rubbishes them, somewhat heartlessly, by marshalling a whole set of facts and figures which his opponents must wish they had known of earlier. And all through this demolition job he continues to remain very, very polite!

His position is very clear, and once made it demonstrates the futility of social science in studying ethnic and sectarian riots. But someone needs to make this point, and Wilkinson does it exceedingly well. His argument is not altogether novel but he makes it stand up in a very persuasive fashion. Simply put, Wilkinson holds that riots do not happen on their own no matter how riot prone an area might appear to be. For a riot to actually take place it needs the active support of those who are supposed to be in charge of the law enforcement machinery. By the same token, the heavy hand of the law can also stop a riot in its tracks even after it has been around for a period of time. Clearly, there is little need for social science: it is all about who did what to whom for how much? The "why" of a riot is clear in all such cases. The overwhelming reason in every instance is to win votes in the next election by demonizing the hated "other".

This has often been portrayed as a species of conspiracy theory of ethnicity/communalism in order to give this point of view a bad name. It only needs the very naïve or the overly ambitious academic who wants to make a living off the misery of others to hold forth the view that riots have structural compulsions behind them and that it requires close social scientific studies to figure out how certain communities were motivated and why they chose to kill. The truth is that all riots are sponsored by conspiracies and by instrumentalism of the grossest kind, and to get a measure of this one has to see a riot first hand or read between the lines of reports to get at the true picture.

This instrumentalist position was made powerfully in the past by Paul Brass and by Donald Horowitz over and above a large number of Indian scholars who were involved in the democratic rights movement in India. Recently, N.J.Demerath made a similar point in his comparative work entitled 'Crossing the Gods' where he argued that cultures by themselves had very little to do with ethnic riots. Instead of the text it is the context that is all important. The context in all such cases is of conspiracy to nail down a particular community in the name of upholding the territorial sovereignty of the nation-state in order to win the next election.

Sadly all parties have played this game with varying degrees of consistency. Of course, Hindu organizations have been in the forefront, but the Congress too is guilty of many transgressions on this count. It is not just in 1984 with the killing of Sikhs that the susceptibility of the Congress in this regard was exposed, but if Wilkinson and others are right in claiming that riots happen with administrative connivance and support then with the Congress in power uninterruptedly for over three decades the blame for the violent anti-Muslim carnages of the first four decades after Independence must lie at its door. Those who choose to only blame the BJP and the Hindu rabid organizations for Hindu-Muslim riots are clearly of rather dubious intellectual worth.

So now that the decks are clear and nobody is innocent any longer, what can we do with the knowledge that riots do not just happen as if they were ordained by nature? Ashutosh Varshney has recently argued that those cities are riot proof which have a history of economic cooperation between communities. Sounds good—even logical, but is it true? I remember how quickly people came out with facile arguments about inter-community economic dependence to explain why Surat did not burn in 2002 and why Varanasi did not have riots after bombs exploded in temples in that city early in 2006. Public memory is short, but shorter still are memories of intellectuals. Surat saw the worst forms of rioting a little more than a decade back when even video films were made rejoicing in sectarian brutality. As for Varanasi it may be easily recalled that this holy city was riot torn in 1991.

In my view Wilkinson is at his devastating best when he demolishes Varshney's argument. Wilkinson shows that riots have been extremely bloody even in those cases where there is a rich tradition of cooperation between communities. Yugoslavia is an obvious example, but so is the animosity between Sikhs and Hindus in the 1980s, particularly in North India. What can give rise to the optical illusion that rich inter-community life acts as a bulwark against riots is the presence of enlightened officials who are active in promoting harmony between different faiths and also for ruthlessly dealing with rioters before a riot actually happens.

Further, Wilkinson argues, there are a host of NGOs who want to look good and get more clients by advocating the importance of building trust and inter-faith harmony. As these are intangibles but noble sounding motives NGOs can easily win money and funds from generous and naïve do-gooders who think that riots are all based on deep cultural misunderstandings. What Wilkinson also makes clear in this process is that a riot occurs not because the state apparatus is weak but because it is willing! This is the crucial point and everything else is really diversionary.

Some social scientists have made other dubious arguments such as linking communal violence to the fiscal health of a region. But as Wilkinson shows Kerela, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and Kerela are in terrible financial condition but are not known for riots. Nor does Lijphart's notion of consociational politics hold water as during the years of the 50s and 60s when the Congress was liberally sprinkled by Muslims and spoke most fervently about secularism the degree of social violence was higher than in the 70s and 80s when according to Lijphart the government was less consociational. In fact, what is little known is that after Independence a clear, if informal, policy emerged in the Congress governments of North India to reduce Muslim representation in government services. According to Wilkinson,

and this is really damning, "(v)erbal instructions were given in 1947 by the state government, led by Mr. Pant (Govind Vallabh- D.G.) not to recruit Muslims in the police" (p. 111). Things gradually came to such a pass that Nehru had to write to state Chief Ministers to lift the embargo and start recruiting Muslims (p.112). To get a glimpse at how bad things had become one has to only look at the number of Muslims in senior administrative positions during the 50s and 60s. As if all this were not enough to discredit the consociational theory, Wilkinson points out that in states with the lowest levels of Muslims in the administration have done very creditably when it comes to controlling riots. Interestingly, though Mulayam Singh Yadav publicly stands for Hindu-Muslim solidarity he did not have a single Muslim who was a full minister in his first cabinet.

The other volume, this time only edited by Wilkinson, is not quite as engrossing or pointed as the earlier book just reviewed above. *Religious Politics and Communal Violence* has some interesting articles but many of them are written by journeymen who should not have been included in a collection that wants to be taken seriously. Fortunately, Ashutosh Varshney finds room in this collection to re-state his argument again about inter-community economic dependence acting as a riot wall, but this time without Wilkinson's incisive interjections. It is interesting how agreeable this point of view seems till someone like Wilkinson points out obvious flaws in it. Shail Mayaram's piece on the Meo's convincingly argues how a minority consciousness is made on the rebound and why the term "communal riot" is misleading for it obscures the "agency" behind riots. Teesta Setelvad's article highlights the bestiality and conspiracy behind the post-Godhra killings in Gujarat clearly bringing out the BJP government's active involvement in the riots and the ways by which the right wing Hindu parties have successfully driven a wedge between the poor.

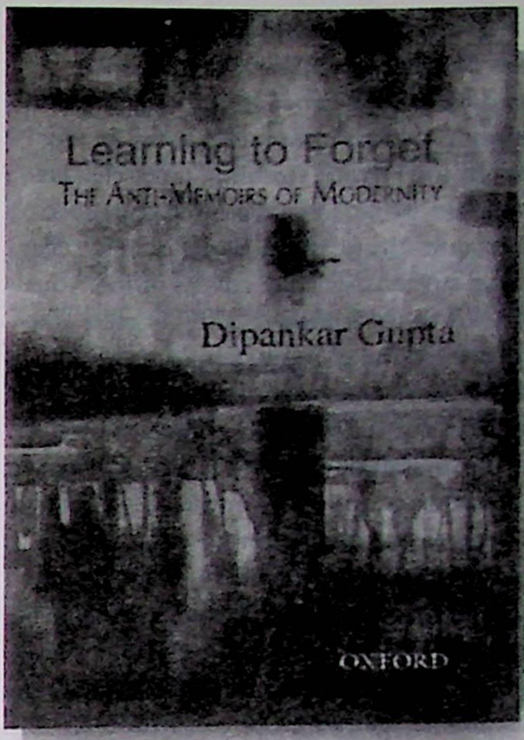
The excerpt from Sudhir Kakar's book *Colours of Violence* is too brief to get a hold of the major argument of his work. This chapter should have come with a commentary from the editor for it appears as if professional strong men and wrestlers are the main agents of a riot, and not the state. Surely, Wilkinson should have something to say about this. But it is also probable that the parts taken out for publication for this volume does not reflect Kakar's overall position on this subject. Pramod Kumar's paper should also have come with some editorial comments for in this case again the argument made goes against Wilkinson's views regarding the genesis and career of a riot. Kumar seems to suggest that riots feed on deep occupational anxieties based on competition and monopoly over certain crafts and trade. According to Kumar the reason why in spite of all this there was no riot in Azamgarh is because there are few lumpen elements in that city. He, however, concedes that when left forces are strong riots are held in check, and this is one conclusion that seems to be in tandem with Wilkinson's general argument. This volume is clearly disappointing: even Paul Brass's opening article does not reflect his bold analytical position regarding the instrumentality behind riots. I cannot quite figure out what led Wilkinson to put all these disparate papers together. There is clearly no accounting for tastes!

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Analysing Social Reality

Carol Upadhya

LEARNING TO FORGET; THE ANTI-MEMOIRS OF MODERNITY
By Dipankar Gupta
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2005, pp. xi+258, Rs. 545.00



This latest offering from the well-known sociologist Dipankar Guptà follows up on arguments developed in his earlier work entitled *Mistaken Modernity.* This is essentially an argument in favour of 'modernity', which Gupta portrays as an ideal disposition and a form of social relations towards which contemporary societies are, or should be, evolving or striving.

Gupta sets out his rather convoluted theoretical and philosophical framework in a long first chapter that is difficult to summarize. His first point is that modernity is an unfinished project — a 'coming into being' – that is manifested differently in different contexts and has not been achieved fully anywhere. Rejecting common 'morphological' definitions of modernity based on industrialization and urbanization or the rise of individualism and of rationality, he defines it as a specific form of *social relations* based on 'intersubjectivity'. Using the term 'intersubjectivity' somewhat differently than is normally understood in sociology, he equates it with another concept, '*iso-ontology*,' which is "a structural condition that creates an ontological sameness". Iso-ontology, he suggests, is the defining feature of modern societies, in contrast to '*poly-ontologies*' of non-modern societies. In a nutshell, Gupta is referring to the classical sociological distinction between 'traditional' societies based on ascribed statuses and identities, and 'achievement'-oriented modern societies in which individual members are recognized as equals and valued for their individual accomplishments. But he goes farther, arguing that the modern individual is one who functions in 'ethical anonymity', which is based on the intersubjective recognition of others as equal and rights-bearing human beings.

The second part of his argument explains the title of the book, 'Learning to Forget': the achievement of modernity is predicated on the wiping out of memory, for it is 'future-oriented'. He criticizes the popular notion of 'multiple modernities' for confusing modernity with the contemporary; instead, contemporary fundamentalist movements (such as the Taliban) or ethnic violence are instances of 'contemporaneous diachrony' that are based on 'poly-ontology' or non-recognition of the other, not outcomes of modernity. Because such social and political mobilizations "actively recall imagined primordial origins when blood mingled with soil" (p. 15) they can call forth extreme violence as well as contemporary forms of martyrdom (chapter 9). Gupta acknowledges that the nation-state was also born out of the imagination of primordial origins, but he brackets the 'modern state', based on the idea of equal citizenship, away from its historical roots in nationalism, regarding it as a distinct development based on the achievement of iso-ontology.

Further developing the argument, Gupta redefines culture in terms of 'root metaphors' that are enacted by members of culturally defined groups or societies within a cultural space. These social interactions based on cultural metaphors and connotations are distinct from another type of social interaction that he terms 'lex', which is based on a body of rules and regulations and depends on 'denotative communication' (p. 23). Lex gives rise to associational ties such as those found in the corporate world that operate in a 'cultural non-space', while 'root metaphors' create passion and cathectic commitment. Needless to say, he regards lex-governed social relations as a sign of modernity. However, lex does not erase cultural metaphors—these are always available in society and indeed may not allow lex-dependent institutions to survive. The question then is how cultural space is modified by modernity, or not. Historically, with the advance of modernity, older traditions were dissolved and replaced by the nation-state, the cultural space was enlarged, and universal norms given greater recognition.

Gupta goes on to argue that a true nation-state is based not just on legal but also substantive citizenship. Iso-ontology "generates intersubjectivity, which makes communication more horizontal and open" (p. 27). It also generates 'ethics' in the Hegelian sense (as opposed to 'morality', which is embedded in traditional societies and religions), and the concept of citizenship. This opens the possibility of 'normative interventions' by the modern state – such as development programmes (chapter 6) and affirmative action (chapter 5) – that help citizens to break free of the 'mire of memory' (quoting John Updike, p. 16) and achieve true citizenship. "But human beings cannot live on lex alone" (p. 35). Lex does not generate passion or fraternity, and 'contemporaneous diachronies' take advantage of this weakness. Hence the "most important issue facing modernity is to be able to couple lex with the sentiments of intersubjectivity and fraternity …" (p. 35). This modernity can do by developing a "tradition of its own" in order to institutionalize inter-subjectivity (p. 38). In fact, he argues that the "nation-state today is a cultural space with its own set of root metaphors and regnant interpretations" (p. 27). The other task of 'modern statecraft' is to "make the past irrelevant to the present and to the future" (p. 15).

These quotes should be sufficient to give the reader a flavour of this book and to suggest that its language may be accessible only to the specialist. The theoretical argument that Gupta develops is both complex and highly condensed, which is why most of the space available for this review has been taken up with a summary of it. Yet without this framework, the rest of the book—in which Gupta applies his theoretical apparatus to a diversity of themes—does not hang together, covering as it does topics from ethnic violence to sports to fashion.

In the second chapter Gupta takes up in more detail the question of history and memory. He explores the factors that erase and sustain memory, singling out sectarian persecution as the major one that 'makes it impossible to forget', and the institution of citizenship based on equal rights as the factor that allows memories of difference to recede. Citizenship is based on equality of status, or what Durkheim called 'resemblances', which is achieved largely through universal education. Following Durkheim, he suggests that knowledge is the key to the development of citizenship: the nation-state must evolve into a 'knowledge-state' that uses knowledge to meet the needs of the citizens and whose legitimacy therefore derives from the provision of health, education, and so on.

Chapter 3 makes a complex argument about the emergence and transformation of the public and private spheres under modernity, and the

rise of a new type of individual based on an ethic of respect for the 'other'. This transition is illustrated by the difference in the meaning of consumption between pre-modern and modern societies. In the former, clothing, food, etc., are status markers, while in modern society we see the rise of uniformity as well as a regime of 'taste'. Gupta also suggests that the advent of individualism is linked to the standardization of rules and norms, or a 'regime of injunctions' (rather than of imperatives, as in traditional society), using modern sports as his example. The fourth chapter expands discussion of taste in modern society and modern aesthetics, focusing on the rise of fashion and its links to the middle class.

Gupta's purpose in this book is not merely sociological, in the sense of trying to analyse an existing social reality, but also prescriptive: it is a passionate defence of modernity as he understands it, against the many critics of modernity. For instance, one of the implications of his theory is that modern states, in order to create true citizens, must attempt to bring about a high degree of intersubjectivity by enhancing the 'minimum common set of resemblances' among them. In chapter 5 he argues that affirmative action and reservations programmes are necessary to create these resemblances. But reservations should not create special interest groups, he says; the aim should be to transform the dalit, for example, into an abstract citizen.

Nor should multiculturalism be allowed to come in the way of modernity, although a degree of cultural diversity is allowable. Taking the example of the ban on wearing Islamic headscarves by girls in French schools, he suggests that the litmus test for the retention of cultural diversity within modern societies is whether cultural symbols or practices interfere with the attainment of the 'minimum common set of resemblances', or with basic human rights; if not—as in the wearing of *hijab* and education—then there is no need to oppose it. While here he appears to be against the imposition of secular/ liberal norms by the state, in fact for Gupta the desire to wear *hijab* is the marked category, harking back to a pre-modern poly-ontological culture and past (perhaps to a historical sense of injustice stemming from French colonial rule), while the 'secular' French state represents the unmarked 'modern' domain of iso-ontology among citizens, presumably emptied of culture – at least of the pre-modern Islamic kind. Cultures and cultural rights that do not interfere with the rules of iso-ontology, as prescribed by modern liberal democracy, are acceptable—the other kinds are not. "Modernity … does not mean that everything in the past has to be denied, but only those elements that stand in the way of intersubjectivity and the development of iso-ontology" (p. 38). Despite the argument about 'lex' and 'root metaphors', his assumption that 'culture' and intersubjectivity are radically different in modern societies is highly questionable.

In chapter 6 Gupta expands this argument by taking on critics of development and those who support the retention of cultural authenticity and 'traditional knowledge'. He asserts that globalization has given rise to new aspirations among the poor, who then put pressure on the system to fulfil them, and that this pressure will drive development forward. The poor, unlike the middle class critics of development, want 'development' and are willing to reject old ways of life to get it. Using the example of the struggle of fisherfolk in Kerala against mechanized fishing, he argues that demands for cultural protection against globalization usually stem from 'unmet aspirations' rather than from a clinging to traditional culture as such. To guard against such resistance, development planning should be oriented to meeting people's 'felt aspirations', for instance by giving traditional fisherfolk the first option to adopt modern technology. While he may be right to debunk the excessive romanticization of traditional lifeworlds and point out that they are also exploitative and deprived, he does not give due recognition to genuine critiques (including those that come from the grassroots) that see modernity as the destroyer of much that is valuable in human life. His position seems to hark back to the long-dead dream of modernization, which heralded economic development, science, technology and democracy as saviours of the oppressed masses, caught in a vicious cycle of poverty, caste oppression, and 'traditional social relations'.

From this perspective, it is not surprising that all his examples of 'modernity' are drawn from Europe, while those of the continuing play of the pre-modern are taken mainly from India. In chapter 8 Gupta uses case studies of the Shiv Sena in Mumbai, Sikh militancy in Punjab, and the Gujarat 'riots' to show what happens when people cling to the past, or use the past for sectarian ends. There is no space to engage with his analysis, except to point out that he understands both 'ethnic' and 'communal' movements as 'ascriptive' but differentiates between them idiosyncratically— defining ethnic movements as those that 'thematise the nation-state' (such as Muslim-Hindu conflict in India) and pose a challenge to territorial integrity, and 'communal movements' as struggles between groups within the nation-state.

Finally, after a discussion of contemporary martyrdom, Gupta returns to the question of history and memory, accusing the disciplines of history and anthropology of fuelling bloody ethnic violence and fundamentalist movements by encouraging an awareness of the past and a naturalization of cultural differences. For Gupta, history and social science scholarship can play a positive role in furthering the cause of citizenship by undermining 'ossified memories' (such as memories of persecution which fuel ethnic warfare) and revealing the irrationality of prejudices. But because history can be used for sectarian and reactionary causes, and because there is strong resistance to forgetting, history writing should be guided by a concern for the present. Not only is 'history for history's sake' dangerous, so is anthropology for highlighting cultural difference. Historians and anthropologists "should realize … that memories and traditions of the past always do more harm than good, and they certainly do not help attain intersubjectivity, or bolster citizenship in any meaningful way" (p. 228). So historians and anthropologists should take up for study only topics that will contribute to the project of modernity rather than reinforcing prejudices.

This argument reflects the author's own prejudices as a sociologist in the classical tradition, ignoring the very important developments and debates that have occurred within history and anthropology over at least the last three decades. Indeed, the general tone of the book reflects the concerns and arguments of 19th century social thought much more than those of the 21st century, and it is revealing that there are more references to Hobhouse, Hegel and Durkheim than to more contemporary theorists of modernity such as Foucault. His orientation to the classical questions of social theory is also evident in Gupta's attempt to develop a singular model of modernity (based inevitably on certain historical developments in western Europe), towards which all societies are seen as moving, or towards which they should be pushed by an enlightened state (guided by an enlightened intellectual elite?). This objective fails to come to terms with the many counter-arguments that have been developed from the 1960s onwards, for instance about the failure of the state in postcolonial societies, the Eurocentricity of social and political theory, or the failure of the 'Enlightenment project' even in the cradle of the Enlightenment.

While Gupta takes up crucial issues such as reservations, development, and communalism, and presents stimulating arguments about modernity and its 'anti-memoirs', its weakness is the density of the arguments, the attempt to cover a very wide scope in a single volume, and the abstruse theoretical framework. It is a difficult read even for those familiar with social and political theory, and probably an impossible one for the general reader. This is a pity, for it is yet another example of how the present generation of senior Indian sociologists, such as Dipankar Gupta and Veena Das (unlike some of the previous generation such as M.N. Srinivas), write on issues of great public concern but fail to reach out to a larger audience because they use a language and style of writing that appears to outsiders as mere 'jargon', or worse.■

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Linear Accounts

Deepak Mehta

EPICENTRE OF VIOLENCE: PARTITION VOICES AND MEMORIES FROM AMRITSAR
Edited by Ian Talbot and Daljit Singh Tatla
Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 234. Rs. 595.00

This is a book on memory and on questions. On questions that we all know but for which we have inadequate explanations, questions that compellingly address us from within contemporary social sciences in India and from within contemporary history. Talbot and Tatla provide a range of first hand contemporary accounts of Partition survivors from Amritsar, a city that became a major transit camp for refugees from Pakistan during the Partition years, and whose geography enabled a recovery of abducted women.

The book carries twenty-five interviews with survivors of Partition violence and an introduction, which places the text within contemporary research on Partition. The interviews are conducted with individuals who speak of their experiences of violence, but also of resettlement and rehabilitation. The latter theme has often been missed in Partition studies and it is to the credit of Talbot and Tatla that they do not censor themes of restitution. The introduction locates the interviews within the broad themes of violence, migration and resettlement and points us to some of the pitfalls in relying on memory as an adequate tool of scholarly analysis. My main problems with this text are twofold: it assumes a direct and referential relation between language and acts of violence; it assumes a perfectly reflective (and rational) speaking subject. In both cases we are unable to read silences, we are forced to a mimetic theory of language, but one that is peculiarly denuded of affect. Manto apart, a vast literature on the play of silence in evoking the terror of Partition, forces us to critique the culturally regnant views of violence and trauma. The text appears to be in a privileged position to critique the 'trauma industry' and to establish the profound links between violence and rehabilitation but it does not. The interviews themselves are straight renditions of people speaking (eloquently, it must be mentioned), but their speech is not placed within contemporary events or everyday life. Perhaps, a case could be made for the extraordinary experiences of survivors but some contextual details would have helped. The interviews themselves are linear accounts, alerting us to the possibility that the language on violence is as much about concealment as expression. The authors mention that these oral accounts are silent on the issue of abducted women and personal agency in the violence, silences that are filled in by documentary evidence. But we do not get a reason for such silences – are they collusive or are they necessary forgettings, so essential for the task of survival? Are silences therapeutic or are they part of collective bad faith? My sense is that these and other modes of interrogation would have greatly enriched an ethnographically sensitive text.

Of the twenty-five interviews, six are with women. Mrs. Satya Vanti speaks of being 'exiled' from her home village of Hallowal in Sialkot District, of rumours that preceded the violence and migration. She talks of the actual journey of her village folk from her village to the border at Gurdaspur and of anxiously negotiating with groups of Muslims. Recently married at the time of Partition, she fears the life of a destitute once she reaches Gurdaspur. Fortunately she is reunited with her husband, and is able to build her life anew but never with the same degree of prosperity that she enjoyed before Partition. In mentioning exile, rumours, forced journeys, this interview is iconic of Partition literature and finds strong resonances in accounts of more recent communal violence in India. From the opposite end, we have the interview with Mrs. Anant Kaur, a graduate from a Lahore college, who made the journey to Amritsar. Mrs. Anant Kaur completed her Masters from Amritsar and was employed in the Rehabilitation Department. She talks of repatriating destitute girls across the border, of how some of them wanted to stay with their Hindu/Sikh 'husbands'. If, after repatriation, the women succeeded in coming back, Anant Kaur says that they were instructed not to send them back again. In her view, neither Sikh nor Hindu ever had good relations with Muslims and the Partition should have happened.

While the interviews with women trace roots through family networks and kin relations, those with men, establish links with religion, history and tradition (Aridaman Singh Dhillon, Bhagwant Singh Khaira, Charan Singh). Almost all the interviews talk of the details of crossing borders, finding the will to survive, securing a life and minimal help provided by the state in rehabilitation. Some are against the grain (Gurdeep Singh Bhatia) to the extent that they see the perfidy of Muslim violence and Hindu imperialism. These interviews are much too diverse and nuanced to arrange into classificatory grids. But the one common theme that runs through all of them is that for all the interviewees the journey across the border was thought to be temporary. Home

The book carries twenty-five interviews with survivors of Partition violence and an introduction, which places the text within contemporary research on Partition...The introduction locates the interviews within the broad themes of violence, migration and resettlement and points us to some of the pitfalls in relying on memory as an adequate tool of scholarly analysis.

would be reclaimed after a temporary madness.

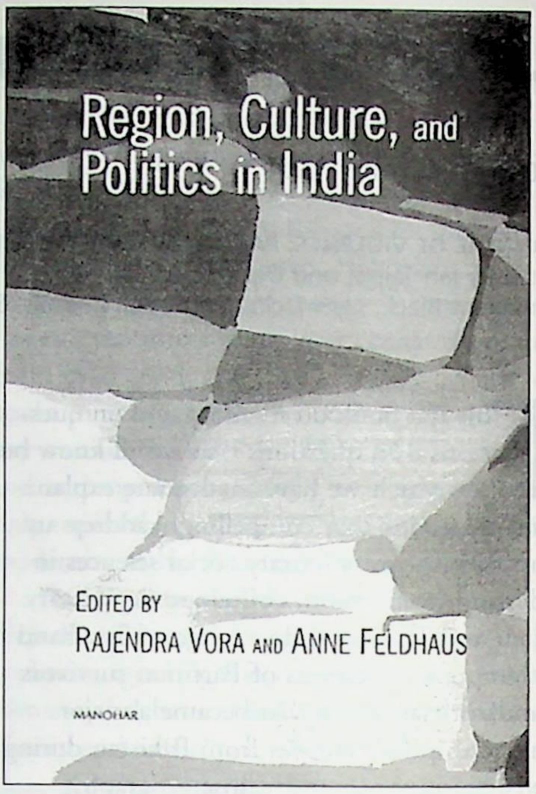
Analytically, what does one do with these interviews? Put in another way, what functions are served by such accounts? What is the relation between narrative and history, between speech and survival, truths that are unspoken, yet inscribed in texts? Before we address ourselves to these questions, we must attend to the issue of witnessing, where concerns of biography and history are neither simply represented, nor reflected. They involve an attitude of listening.■

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Regions and Regional Consciousness

Sudha Pai

REGION, CULTURE, AND POLITICS IN INDIA
Edited by Rajendra Vora & Anne Feldhaus
Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 380, Rs. 795.00



In recent years the study of regions has assumed importance among social scientists in India. The process of transforming cultural regions into politico-administrative units is not over as seen from numerous demands for dividing larger states into smaller ones. There is much greater recognition that language is not the only basis on which the states can be divided. The role played by regional parties in governance at the Centre has changed the balance of power among states/regions in the post-Congress era. The volume under review through fourteen essays attempts a multidisciplinary analysis of the processes through which regions and regional consciousness has been created and sustained through history and in contemporary India. The contributors to the volume have studied these processes through analysis of oral and written literature, festivals, pilgrimages, everyday rituals, caste and religious identity and politics. The essays cover a number of states across the subcontinent including studies on sub-regional identities and two studies on cities.

In the introduction Rajendra Vora and Anne Feldhaus reviewing the various ways in which regions have been defined by geographers, sociologists and anthropologists, argue that regions are 'mental constructs' by its inhabitants. Regionalism is the expression of 'regional consciousness' an ideology founded on the linguistic, ethnic and cultural identity of the people of a particular area. Based on it regionalist movements make demands for greater autonomy, cultural recognition, or secession. The editors point out that throughout history pan-Indian and regionalist forces have interacted with each other—throwing up both regional kingdoms and central empires—constantly redrawing the map of the subcontinent. However, the feeling of belonging to India and a consciousness of both the separate regions and of India as a country as a whole, or of unity in diversity, *emerged only in the nationalist period* through the writings and activities of nationalist leaders. But the nationalists nurtured an already existing sense of commonality and coherence among various parts of the country. Thus, India need not be seen as an invention of colonialism or of the nationalists, but as constructed on the foundations of a civilizational bond.

Unlike some scholars who have maintained that Indian culture is more a union of distinctive cultures of different regions, or others who hold the position of "cultural holism" (p.10) Vora and Feldhaus argue that both positions are tenable. For them *both* region and nation are a reality in the contemporary period, the tension between them being at times, unmanageable. It is the various dimensions of this unity in diversity that the contributors analyze in different ways in the volume. Reviewing the existing literature on the subject, the editors place their volume among a genre of books that through a multidisciplinary lens have dealt with the *idea* of the region—its latent and manifest forms, its development over time through stages into regionalism, formation of regional cultures on the subcontinent and its complex relationship with nationalism.[1] The editors claim that their volume can be seen as a fifth in this series continuing many of the ideas in the previous studies.

The contributions are arranged in three distinct groups: aiming at the historical, ethno-cultural and political study of regions. The essays in part one examine the emergence of regional consciousness and identities through history in various parts of the country. A running theme is the interconnection between the regional and the national that emerges in various ways. In Kerala this is seen in the emergence of Kerala-*bhasa* from Tamil. Rich Freeman points to a 'gradient' of literary regional consciousness: the trans-regional sphere of Sanskrit, the inter-regional sphere of Kerala and Tamil regions and the intra-regional sphere of locally competing literary and caste dialects. In case of Maharashtra, Irina Glushkova and Prachi Deshpande's essays point to the construction of regional pride and consciousness within the national movement through the construction of notions of *Maharashtra Dharma* and *Asmita* and the writings and activities of an entire generation of nationalist writers such as Bhandarkar, Jotiba Phule, Chiplunkar, Rajwade and Ranade, respectively. In contrast in Orissa according to Bishnu Mohapatra regional identity and assertion developed out of a sense of inferiority to 'others' mainly Bengalis and other neighbours who were able to advance faster in many walks of life including employment within the colonial structures. Sumathi Ramaswamy in an interesting piece explains how loss rather than possession can create a deep sense of belonging and togetherness, through a detailed study of the Tamil nostalgia for the lost land of Lemuria (*Kumarikkandam*). Finally Jim Masselos although writing about a single city shows how Mumbai has always enjoyed a distinctive place on the subcontinent as a key power centre with connections radiating to the regions around it and to the nation.

The essays in part two based on ethnographic work illustrate how cultural modes can create a sense of awareness, mark out and create a feeling of belonging about a 'place' that lies within a larger region. Anne Feldhaus and Leela Prasad demonstrate this sense of belonging by analysing pilgrimages and rituals practised in shrines in Maharashtra and Karnataka. In both cases the sense of identity is rooted in the past but also in the present when it is re-enacted annually through ancient rituals. In contrast in an urban setting Daniel Jasper explains how the historical commemorations of Shivaji the Maharasthra ruler has enabled a region—through a tradition begun in the colonial period—to identify with him. While it facilitated mobilization during the nationalist movement, he continues to be a symbol of the spirit of the region. In a different way Sanjay Palshikar shows how 'Maharashtrians' identify with a 'modern' symbol—the *Kalnirnay* Marathi calendar published since 1973 that keeps them informed of festivals, annual pilgrimages and rituals of all social groups—even the smaller minorities—in all parts of the state. It binds the people of the state neatly together reminding them of their shared past and uniting them in the present.

The essays in the last part of the volume explore the relationship between region and politics and how caste and religion-based identities become politically salient on entering the regional political arena. Suhas Palshikar examines the different patterns thrown up in

the states due to interaction between regional and caste-based politics during the 1990s, an era of regionalization of politics. Two essays focus on identity formation among the Sikhs and the Muslims. While the story of the historical development of identities in the Punjab covers familiar ground, Surinder Jodhka points out that the territoriality of a region becomes significant only when it is 'claimed' by a community – in this case Sikhs – prior to which it was shared by Hindus and Muslims and was fluid. He argues that this historical process can be traced among other socio-cultural groups on the continent specially those where the fit between culture and region was not very neat and was claimed in comparatively recent times, contributing to our understanding of nation-formation. In a similar vein, Rajendra Vora's study of the Muslims of the Hindi heartland focuses on their distinct history, identity and problems, which differentiates them from their community in other parts of the subcontinent. He argues that they can either remain second-class citizens in the northern plains or get rid of the "curse of minorityism" by joining and finding common cause with the Bahujan movement made up of all the backward communities and thereby become part of the mainstream. Sujata Patel's valuable study of communal politics in Ahmedabad city connects communal riots to long-term regional politics in Gujarat. She points to a complex intermeshing of caste, class and religious identities with the politics of exclusion, due to which the city became an arena of conflict between SCs and Muslims, between BCs and Muslims as also upper castes and SCs, and Hindus and Muslims.

Individually the essays provide useful and at times fascinating reading. Collectively the sweep of the contributions is very wide, ranging from cultural regions based on myth and folklore to political and riot-prone regions. This creates the lack of an overarching framework that holds them together except the *idea* of the region as a building block of the nation. While the *concept* of region and its role in Indian history has been well discussed in the introduction, it has not been related to culture and politics, which underlie the second and third part of the volume. How do these regions fit into the large project of nation-building which is also the theme in the four earlier volumes referred to by the editors? This could have taken the discussion on the interplay of regions and the nation – one of the main aims of the volume – further. Despite this it is a valuable collection that provides in one place a wealth of fascinating details on the diversity of regions on the subcontinent. The volume will be useful for social scientists grappling with the problems that regionalism is throwing up today.■

Reference

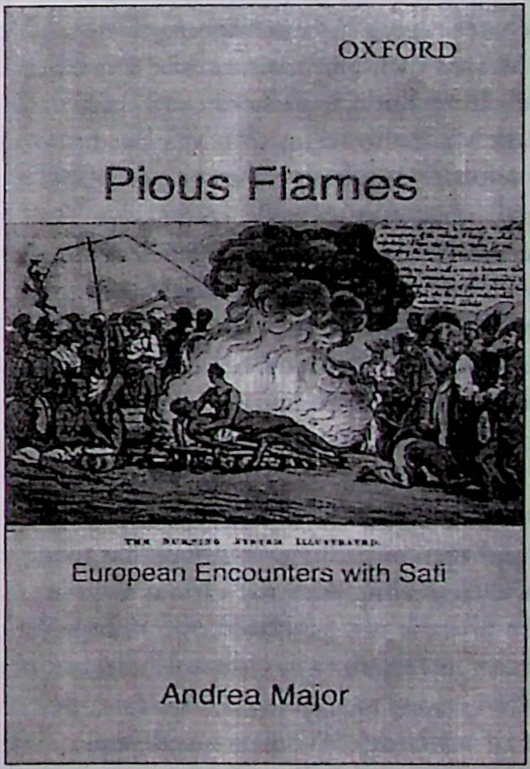
[1] The reference is to four well known edited volumes/articles beginning with *Regions and Regionalism in South Asian Studies* (Robert Crane 1967); *Realm and Region in Traditional India* (Richard Fox 1977); *The Geographical Patterning of Culture in India* (David E. Sopher 1980) and more recently *Region and Nation in India* (Paul Wallace 1985).

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Myriad Ramifications of Self-Immolation

Amiya P. Sen

PIOUS FLAMES: EUROPEAN ENCOUNTERS WITH SATI, 1500-1830
By Andrea Major
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006, pp.231, Rs. 625.00



It is not often, I imagine, that a subject is able to draw forth two landmark productions in fairly quick succession. Happily, this indeed has been the case with 'sati' and particularly, modern readings thereof. In 1998, interested readers woke up to a startlingly new thesis in Lata Mani's *Contentious Traditions** that took the issue out of its standard, unproblematized 'social reform' framework and placed it in the arena of contestations. Sati, in Lata Mani's understanding, was the fulcrum on which a redefinition of Indian tradition itself rested. It was, equally, an issue around which boundaries of legitimate state intervention had to be redrawn or the parameters of colonial control renegotiated. However, this thesis, though widely acclaimed, also apparently had its critics—almost at its inception, one might say, for, I noticed that research for the present work that departs so significantly from that of Lata Mani, was begun by 1999, i.e barely a year later.

In the work under review, Andrea Major examines at length, changing British and European perceptions of sati and other matters that came to be discursively associated with it. The image of sati was not only an object of interest by itself but one that also came to be tied up with other public debates over gender, suicide, religion or the treatment of the human body. This, as our author claims, coincided with shifts in the nature of public concerns and varying perceptual frameworks adopted for each. Thus, whereas in the 18th century, sati was largely understood in terms of religious practices, in the 19th, it became more closely linked with anxieties related to the status of women. It is at this point that the arguments put forth by Mani and Major begin to depart from one another. The former, by focusing on official attitudes towards sati, grounds her arguments on matters like political expediency. The latter, by comparison, appears to take greater cognizance of public culture and ideology. Whereas Mani would have us believe that sati was used primarily to emphasize the Hindu's cultural 'otherness' and therefrom to vindicate the political agenda of colonialism, Major throws open a new aspect to this issue by demonstrating how sati was often understood through a location of similarities and resonance with western society and ideas. After all, patriarchy, depicting the woman as the weaker and the more corruptible of the two sexes or the emphasis on female chastity are values that western and Indic societies clearly shared. Thus, even as late as 1910, J. Ramsay MacDonald had reason to adulate the 'beautiful and romantic side' that he found in the widow's self-immolation. In 1927 again, the British politician, R.J. Hurst employed moral relativism to argue how, sadly, in the whole debate on sati, the orthodox

*See review in *The Book Review*, Vol. XXVI No. 1 (January 2002), p. 12

Hindu side had remained hidden from British view. Sati, in other words, was not a moral constant over which the British or Europeans worried in an unchanging manner or with the same ideological preoccupations.

It is apparent to me that Andrea Major's work also carries an important critique of the Saidian tendency to view Orientalism as a totalizing, unified cultural hegemony that is impervious to dissenting or counter-hegemonic voices. Building upon the pioneering work of Lisa Lowe (*British and French Orientalism*, 1991), Major demonstrates how, even allowing for the unequal power relations between the colonizer and the colonized, the colony and the metropole, the Orientalist terrain remained, unstable, often self-contradictory and heterogeneous. The British public, to cite only one instance, took serious note of the widow's volition as defined in legal terms and yet undermined her agency by casting her as the hapless victim of a barbaric pagan practice.

It follows from the present work that Lata Mani's otherwise pathbreaking deconstruction of the debate on sati has suffered from two methodologically flawed assumptions. First, she seems to have erred in assuming that the official discourse on sati could be justly separated from larger debates raging in contemporary civic society. Major's own emphasis, on the contrary, is on their interconnectedness. Second, in her work, Lata Mani also seems to have placed a disproportionate emphasis on records available for Bengal. This, as it emerges, could be somewhat misleading as the presidencies of Bombay and Madras are sometimes known to have significantly different positions on the sati question. Apparently, even though the debate on sati acquired a pan-Indian resonance, there are regional specificities that cannot be lost sight of.

Apart from the standard introductory chapter and the concluding, this book has five chapters, each dealing with the various ways in which the practice was perceived over time both in India and in Britain. The titles to these, are in themselves quite evocative viz. 'Sati and the spectacle of suffering', 'Woman suicide and Madness', or 'Sati and Religion'. I have to confess though that I was quite partial to the last, partly in keeping with my own academic interests but also because of the several insightful observations that Major makes therein. On p. 203 for instance, there is the perceptive comment that the British may have deliberately overplayed the argument about property and pecuniary greed behind most cases of sati since this allowed them to place the matter more clearly within the sphere of criminal law. An even more original and insightful observation reveals how European perceptions about the complicity of the self-seeking brahman priest in the sati rite did not change as radically as did perceptions about the rite itself. This discrepancy between the shifting image of the widow and the static image of the brahman the author seeks to explain not in terms of their identity as Hindus but specifically as woman and priest (p.205).

There is one aspect to this book that I found not as fully developed or persuasive. If, as Major argues, colonial knowledge on sati was not something imposed on India but in part, of India's own creating, this does not seem to be borne out by her selection of sources. Some use, I imagine, could have been made of available vernacular sources unless of course one was to assume that counter-hegemonic discourse was always expressed in the English language. Within English language sources too, the collection of documents by J.K. Majumdar I found to be a strange omission. If Orientalism is at heart a matter of intersubjectivity and not merely a subject-object relationship, I wondered what might have happened to the discourse emanating from Rammohun Roy or his intellectual adversary, Mritunjoy Vidyalankar, each of whom, interestingly enough, condemned the practice of sati and yet identified themselves with opposite camps during the entire controversy. Now Rammohun's role has indeed been mentioned at places without, however, going into the question of how far his ideas may have shaped British thinking of the day. I recall, for instance, Rammohun's rhetoric on how, insofar as the Hindu widow was concerned, ascetic selflessness as laid down in the *Gita* was preferable to self-immolation on the funeral pyre. In hindsight, we know how such arguments somewhat weakened the subsequent campaign for widow marriages; the question to ask here though, is whether they also served to bring out the more conservative side to British public opinion. I know it for a fact that contrary to the opinion of the later day Brahmo Samaj, Rammohun, at times, put a restraining hand on the legislator Bentinck.

This is, on the whole, an excellent work backed by some meticulous research, finely crafted prose, rare illustrations and above all, original and insightful arguments. It is a work that I would strongly recommend to all students and scholars of south Asian cultural and social history.■

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Errata

Seema Alavi is Professor in the Depatment of History and Culture, Jamila Millia Islamia, New Delhi. The error in the reviewer's credit on p. 16 of the South Asia Special VII (The Book Review, Vol. XXX, No. 5) is regretted.

Irony and Hypocrisy Regarding Human Rights

Usha Ramanathan

THE FUTURE OF THE UN AND INTERNATIONAL LAW AFTER THE IRAQ WAR
Edited by Bernhard Vogel, Rudolf Dolzer and Matthias Herdegen
Social Science Press, New Delhi, 2005, pp.xviii+200, Rs. 595.00

Caution and hypocrisy, cast off in pursuit of a war in Iraq, has claimed several casualties. Amidst the debris left by the continuing war is the relevance of the UN system in matters of war and peace. It may require a superlative effort, some suspension of disbelief and collective amnesia, to help the UN recover from the drubbing it received when the United States and the United Kingdom invaded Iraq. Yet, because there are so few pegs to hang hope on, there is a need to find in the UN an arena where prejudice, pragmatism and power can, even if only apparently, be debated and dealt with without being pre-empted by warheads, missiles and worse. This is reflected in the contributions to this edited volume which is the product of a conference sponsored by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation. The conference and this publication were to commemorate the Petersburg Agreement concluded on 22 November 1949 between the Allied Powers and the Federal Republic of Germany which marked the beginning of what the Preface says was "the first essential, if not decisive, step towards Western orientation and the recovery of sovereignty for the Federal Republic of Germany" (p.7). The contributors, then, have among them Members of Parliament and Ministers from Germany, Uzbekistan, China, Chile, an American Assistant Secretary of State for International Organisational Affairs, judges from South Africa and Costa Rica and academics from India, Singapore, Germany and Argentina.

It is only the occasional contributor who struggles to find a route to legalizing US unilateralism. Chin Leng Lim, from the Society of International Law, Singapore, makes this valiant effort. There is the Bush Doctrine, he says, of preventive self-defence. There is the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) thesis that "a violation by Iraq of obligations which undermine the basis for ceasefire contained in Security Council Resolution 687 (1991) can revive the authorisation to use force in Resolution 670 (1990)", even if blandly invoked 12 years later. Professor Brownlie had found that the intention of the US extended to "(1) disarmament of Iraq, and (2) bringing about a regime change in Iraq" (p.179) neither of which was an issue of self-defence. So, he had said, it was not a matter of a pre-emptive strike at all. Professor Greenwood had differed from the FCO thesis only to the extent that he believed an authoritative pronouncement by the Security Council would be required to give legality to action. The difference between the two positions, Lim deduces, concerned only the notion of 'imminent threat' in the international law of self-defence, and not whether the Security Council would have a critical role. And, "in my view, once Security Resolution 1441 (2002: that Iraq had been in material breach of the terms of Resolution 687 for 12 years) was passed, the absence of a multilateral consensus did not automatically make the armed action in Iraq unlawful..." (p.181) And, just in case, he adds: "That the so-called weapons of mass destruction (WMD) which Iraq was said to possess still have not been discovered, and perhaps were not there in the first place, may be highly relevant in other respects, but irrelevant to the legal issue at hand".

Others, while yet willing to work at deflecting condemnation of US action in Iraq, do not stretch logic and interpretation so far as this. Maybe the closest to this position is found in Mathias Herdegen's attempt to delve the "fundamental values" of the "modern international legal order" (p.190). Illustrating with Kosovo, he ascribes the disruption of the traditional international law doctrine to an "instrumental revaluation (in the sense of unilateral enforceability, even by the use of force) of fundamental human rights (particularly protection against genocide) by means of so-called humanitarian intervention" (p.187). The American security doctrine, he would have it, balances the prohibition of use of force with "other core values, especially the survival interest of a state". (p.189) And, military strategies of countries beyond the US are seen as "taking up the idea that pre-emptive action against threats should be taken well in advance of the danger, *even if the probability of prognosis is uncertain*". (p.187: emphasis added) So, the role of the Security Council would be to ascertain the evidence of the "threat to fundamental values of the community of states". (p.193) And so on, including a call to states to live up to their "fiduciary commitment" to make it "more difficult .... to find reasons to justify unilateral action" (p.199).

> It is difficult to dispute that US unilateralism and exceptionalism have reduced the UN to a meek and helpless bystander when the mighty decide that they are not to be stopped from going to war. That this has led to confused incomprehension about how to treat the halo that had developed around the US as the policeman of the world is also evident.

How the American establishment participates in a conference of this kind is, of course, of a certain interest, even if it is predictable. Kim Holmes, an American Assistant Secretary of State for International Organisation Affairs performs this patriotic task. "The most important security issue confronting the world" is – and no marks for guessing – "the nexus between terrorism and WMD" (p. 35). Because of this, the UN is no longer the marginal player it was in the Cold War (p. 35). "Preventive action and pre-emption" are, of course, justified. Pre-emption, in any event, "is not new at all. The US and other law-abiding states have always reserved the right to respond to an imminent armed attack" (p. 42). So, "what we are talking about here are responses to the threat of terrorism and WMD, considered against a backdrop of wanton attacks already perpetrated" (p. 42). What, one may be moved to ask, has this to do with the war in Iraq? When did the connection between the Twin Towers and Saddam Hussein get established? Wasn't there something about planting pieces in the press to drag Iraq on to a canvas where it was not known to belong – even if Saddam Hussein was a bad man? Wasn't there at least a whiff of a scandal when neither WMDs, nor a basis for suspecting their existence on Iraqi soil turned up – other than the belief that the regime was devilish and so you couldn't put it past them? The logic, therefore, has to be found elsewhere, and it is found in the sage words of President Bush: "The greater the threat, the greater the risk of inaction" (p. 43). And, we are steered to an article by the State Department's Legal Advisor, for "it makes clear that Operation Iraqi Freedom was and is lawful under the existing applicable rules" (p. 44). Sure, we don't need to seek further for an impartial, disinterested, reliable, definitive authority! (Just by the way, it has been heard to be said that Operation Iraqi

So, "what we are talking about here are responses to the threat of terrorism and WMD, considered against a backdrop of wanton attacks already perpetrated" (p. 42). What, one may be moved to ask, has this to do with the war in Iraq? When did the connection between the Twin Towers and Saddam Hussein get established? Wasn't there something about planting pieces in the press to drag Iraq on to a canvas where it was not known to belong – even if Saddam Hussein was a bad man?

Freedom started off as Operation Iraqi Liberation, but that was abandoned as its acronym lacked subtlety.) In conclusion, and anyway, "whether you believe that the threat of WMD in Iraq was imminent or merely 'gathering', no one can doubt that Saddam Hussein had violated the binding obligations of the Security Council. He was a menace to his neighbours and to his own people. If left unchecked, we believed he would become a menace to us all" (p.46). That is pretty straightforward and evident, surely!!

This collection is testimony to a perception that when the might of the US is on display, confrontation seems, at this point in history, unwise. So the responses range from finding legality in the US action – so that legality does not itself get knocked off its perch – to sidestepping the issue (the Chilean representative asks for a more diverse and representative Security Council, the Costa Rican judge meanders off to the statute for establishing an International Criminal Court), to talking about institutions in a way that closely resembles myth-making (Shen Guofang speaks of the "ample evidence" of the "accomplishments" of the Security Council, for example, in "... resolving the Gulf crisis, ... and defusing the nuclear crisis between India and Pakistan" (p.138)) But there are still those who attend conferences and speak their mind.

Richard Goldstone, a retired judge of the South African Constitutional Court, takes on the US government for "acting excessively" after "an invasion of what it calls its homeland" (p. 61). History, he says, is repeating itself, while likening the incarceration of prisoners in Guantanamo Bay to the internment of 70,000 American-born citizens of Japanese descent in the aftermath of Pearl Harbour. "Such conduct by other governments around the world have in the recent past earned strong criticism of the US" (p. 61). "Racial profiling and detaining illegal immigrants from Muslim countries has become a frequently applied mechanism" and could perhaps be justified only if the "facts make it effective and proportionate to the dangers perceived". And then, a statistic that damns: "Of the more than 1200 non-US citizens arrested in the weeks following 11 September, only three have been indicted for terrorist activities" (p. 62). The "disproportionate invasion of civil liberties is a matter of concern to all democracies and is calculated to reverse and do permanent damage to the significant advances in the protection of human rights and freedoms since the end of World War II" (p. 63). None of this is new to the discourse; yet, the conference seems to have had very few willing to say it out loud. Maybe it was politeness to the American guest that prompted the obfuscations and silences?

The Indian contribution is the meat of the volume. V.S. Mani, an expert in international law who now heads the law school in Gandhinagar, Gujarat, has written an elaborate article spread over little less than a third of the printed pages in the book, lending weight and worth for the reader who wants more than an insight into how diplomacy is practised at conferences.

He starts with citing three principal justifications for the 2003 Iraq invasion: gross and persistent violations of Security Council resolutions; anticipatory self-defence; and regime change. In a prelude, he acknowledges "the deaths of thousands of Iraqi civilians, and the destruction of much of the essential infrastructure facilities in Iraq, including those for the supply of water and electricity" occasioned by "indiscriminate bombing" (p. 74). Then he traverses the WMD-terrorism terrain. Contextualizing terrorism rather than defining it, he leads us back to the start of the exercise when, in 1949, the International Law Commission was charged with drafting a code of offences and the focus was "on acts of state terrorism of types practised by the Nazis" (p. 84). He traces the 'irony' and 'hypocrisy' that pervades the treatment of terrorism, with state terrorism virtually disappearing from sight. In an estimation of the response to terrorism, his judgment is that the greatest challenge an international anti-terrorism regime is likely to face continues to be the tendency on the part of great powers and their close allies to resort to unilateral punitive action under the garb of counter-terrorist response, indeed throwing to the winds norms of decency and proportionality, principles of international humanitarian law, and above all, the principle of legitimacy in terms of rights and wishes of the people of the target state" (p.100).

There is an Indian draft law on terrorism since 2000, which deserves careful study, particularly in view of the internal laws and policies relating to terrorism which are changing the power-people equation (esp. endnote 31 at p.125-126). In the international arena, in Mani's assessment, "the fate of the Indian initiative will .... depend upon a diplomatic breakthrough on the issue of definition of terrorism vis-a-vis national liberation movements" (p.93).

He traces the hypocrisy on nuclear "non-proliferation", and the "megalomaniac assumption" which leads to the belief "that the western nuclear haves and their allies as well as others brought in line with them, have a divine right to take against any other state straying out of line – a modern version of the 'Just War' doctrine recently unveiled" (p.104).

Mani's article contextualizes and analyses with the ease of the expert. There is, however, one flaw, and not so minor a one either. In an article written for a 2003 conference, there is no reference to the International Criminal Court, not even when the evolving definition of mass crimes is the subject. It is difficult to imagine that Mani just simply missed it; but no other explanation offers itself.

In a volume where diplomacy is practised hard, Wolfgang Schauble's article raises eyebrows all the way beyond even the receding hairline. Take this statement: "the problem ... nowadays," he says, is that "the majority of members of the UN hardly correspond to our Western concept of human rights, the rule of law and democracy. For this reason, and also because of the very different sizes of the member states, the principle of majority voting, for example, can hardly be a suitable element of order for the UN" (p.13). And, after lamenting the 'split in the Western alliance' (p.14): "In any case, I am convinced that coherence of the Western World is the only adequate response to all these challenges. America cannot find a better partner than Europe and the same applies vice versa. Across the Atlantic, in a unique way, we share experiences and values of living together. Therefore, and also in the face of the challenges and dangers confronting us all, we share a common destiny" (p.16). Was this craven plea to a state that was, in essence, under trial at the conference, really presented knowing that its Asian and Latin American participants were listening in? (There is no one from the Arab world or the African continent except for Judge Goldstone.)

It is difficult to dispute that US unilateralism and exceptionalism have reduced the UN to a meek and helpless bystander when the mighty decide that they are not to be stopped from going to war. That this has led to confused incomprehension about how to treat the halo that had developed around the US as the policeman of the world is also evident. Finding legality where it is no longer resident, condemning the action, and sidestepping questions that the action raises are some possible responses, and they are each represented in the pieces that make up this volume. It is still moot, though, whether now is already 'after the Iraq war'.■

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Human Rights Perspectives

Rakesh Shukla

HANDBOOK OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE: THE SYSTEM AND PROCEDURE
South Asian Human Rights Centre, Oxford University Press, 2006, pp.208, Rs. 595.00

To bring out a handbook on the criminal justice system is in itself an ambitious task. Trying to combine it with human rights borders on the daring. However, the volume does manage to give an overall idea of the criminal justice delivery system taking us through the various steps from the filing of a first information report (FIR) and investigation to trial. In addition there are chapters on bail and detention from a human rights perspective.

Addressing real life situations faced by persons harassed day in and day out by the criminal justice system and who are predominantly from the lower socio-economic sections of society would have added greatly to the volume. The chapter on lodging of FIR does mention that in case the police refuse to register it, then the complaint can be sent to the Superintendent of Police. However, it fails to engage with the reality that the SP rarely takes any action in terms of registration and investigation on complaints sent directly to him.

Interpretation plays a vital role in law. In the context of human rights an interpretation which favours citizens, reducing the arbitrary power of the police is to be preferred over others. The Criminal Procedure Code (Section 154) makes it mandatory for a police officer to register an FIR on information being given about the commission of a cognizable offence. There is no room for discretion to be exercised by the police officer in the matter. In fact, the FIR is the basis of initiating investigation. Phrases like "credible information" or "reasonable complaint" have not been used in the provision.

The Supreme Court recently in Ramesh Kumari versus State NCT of Delhi, 2006(2) SCALE 457, affirming a 1992 decision in State of Haryana versus Bhajan Lal 1992 Supp(1) SCC 335, categorically reiterated that the police is statutorily obliged to register an FIR. That at the stage of registration of a crime the police cannot embark upon an enquiry as to whether the information is reliable and genuine. "Genuineness or credibility of the information in not a condition precedent for registration of a case" as per the judgment.

It is puzzling to read in the chapter on reporting a crime that: "In certain situations, the police may conduct a preliminary enquiry to establish the existence of a legitimate complaint. It is within their powers to refuse to immediately register the FIR. In that case, they may make a general diary entry, and, depending on time constraints and the gravity of the offence, could make an on-the-spot verification." No specific provision or judicial authority has been cited as the basis for this view. The world over, police manipulate crime statistics. At times of media and citizen concern about rising violence, robberies, thefts the police register less cases and claim that crime has come down. Even in India, sometimes the police do not register a case despite information being given about the commission of a serious offence, but this practice has no sanction in law.

On paper our laws from dowry prohibition, bonded labour abolition to the circumscribed powers of arrest by the police and mandatory production before a magistrate within twenty-four hours look good. The ground reality is a different cup of tea altogether.

The practice of the police colloquially referred to as "*thane mein baitha lena*"—that is detaining persons in the police station with no formal entries of arrest—which makes a total mockery of constitutional guarantees and fundamental rights, is rampant across the length and breadth of this vast land. Although there is no provision in law authorizing detention of the relatives of an accused, the police habitually detain the aged parents, wife and other near relatives in case they are not able to find the accused. This practice does not even find mention in the chapter on investigation.

Similarly, right to consult a lawyer during interrogation is mentioned quoting the Supreme Court judgement in the Nandini Satpathy case in 1978 and Article 22 of the Constitution. In fact, the volume goes on to advise: "If for some reason a person does not have access to his or her lawyer during interrogation, he or she should ask to be taken to a magistrate immediately after the interrogation…". Reading it leaves the impression that not having access to a lawyer is something of an exception which happens in rare cases. That the only limitation is that the lawyer cannot be present throughout the interrogation as laid down in the Satpathy case.

The fact is that regardless of the Satpathy judgement, by and large a person being interrogated is almost never allowed to consult a lawyer. The police which has custody does not allow access to lawyers and generally courts do not intervene at the interrogation stage. It is only in a rare instance or two involving influential individuals that consultation with a lawyer occurs at the interrogation stage.

The National Human Rights Commission guidelines on the polygraph or 'lie-detector' test are informative. The fact that the police cannot coerce a person to take the test is useful information. A discussion on the recent trend of using narco-analysis on the accused in the context of the constitutional guarantee against self-incrimination would have enriched the text.

The lack of proper investigation by the police in criminal cases has been a longstanding problem of our criminal justice system. The acquittals in the recent Jessica Lal and Priyadarshini Mattoo cases are stark illustrations. A section on legal remedies available when a complainant-survivor is certain that the police is not conducting an impartial investigation, as often happens when the victim is weak and the perpetrator powerful or in instances of communal violence, would have been useful.

Coming to the chapter on bail, it is true that as far back as 1979 in the first ever public interest litigation—the Bihar Undertrial case (Hussainaira Khatoon versus State of Bihar), the Supreme Court laid down that factors like length of residence, employment, family ties, reputation and ties to community should be taken into account. These factors have been dutifully listed in the handbook. However, release on bail continues to be mechanically linked to the production of monetary sureties by courts. Even a quarter of a century after the judgment, many a poor undertrial continues to languish in prison due to the inability to produce sureties.

In the chapter on detention the requirements laid down by the D.K. Basu judgement to check custodial death and torture have been listed. Police officers conducting arrest and interrogation should bear clear identification and name tags, memo of arrest with sign of one witness and the arrestee must be prepared, the person arrested is entitled to inform a friend or relative, medical examination every forty-eight hours, entries in diary about the arrest and the police officers who have custody and so on. These requirements though binding as the law declared by the apex court are invariably not followed. The maximum it has resulted in is the D.K. Basu requirements being put up on a board in the police stations and then violated with impunity.

In a similar vein the *Handbook* lists remedies available when a person's rights have been violated. It talks of compensation in cases of illegal detention for violation of fundamental rights. Courts had been awarding ex-gratia compensation for custodial deaths since the eighties. Dealing with a custodial death case from Orissa, in the Nilabati Behera case (1993) the Supreme Court has laid down the principle

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of compensation for contravention of fundamental rights. However, compensation remains confined to custodial deaths. Rudul Shah who was given 35,000/- for fourteen years detention after acquittal(1983) and Arvind Singh Bagga's case (1994) have been mentioned in the text. The other case which comes to mind is of Bhim Singh who was awarded Rs. 50,000/- compensation for four days illegal detention in 1985. The fact that over a period of twenty-five years it is in a stray case or two that court has given compensation for illegal detention needs to find mention when being suggested as a possible remedy. Other remedies mentioned like actionable trespass on property for illegal search or prosecution of police officers for illegal confinement remain more or less on paper and are unheard of in practice.

A mere statement of the law about powers of arrest, search, seizure, detention, bail, trial, remedies available for violation of rights may be enough for a textbook on law. A handbook on human rights needs to place the law in concrete situations and suggest possible courses of action to persons facing harassments by the criminal justice system. The book is over-priced at Rs. 595/- and also suffers from the danger of falling between two stools. It may be too simplistic for lawyers and not grounded enough in reality for activists and laypersons.■

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The Rights Dialogue

R. Venkataramani

THE FUTURE OF HUMAN RIGHTS
By Upendra Baxi
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 339, Rs. 595.00

With the publication of the book under review, Professor Baxi has joined the club of class of that thinkers and writers who generate a set of commentators.

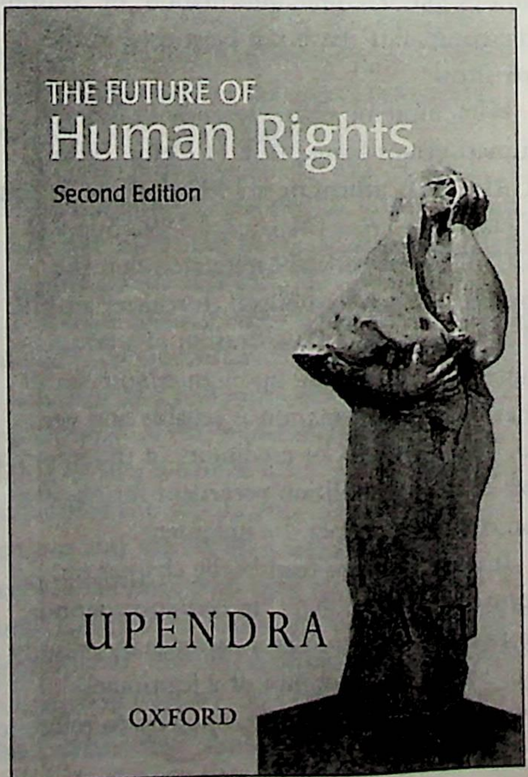
A good deal of postmodernist writing is free from narrow doctrinaire or ideological impositions. The search for a global language towards articulating freedom struggles of a variety of rightless sections of the community is itself a product of impoverished democracies and disguised dictatorships. The struggle for the autonomy of the human person besides other requisitions to the community is also a demand for the creation of necessary conditions for the recognition, acknowledgment and promotion of that fundamental value. While this struggle seems to be eternal, the extent of community preoccupation with the contours of the struggle do vary and have always varied. Culture and religion, economics and social adventures, have all played their apparently divided roles.

Baxi grappled with these in his book *Inhuman Wrongs and Human Rights* when he writes thus: – "The moral monotheism of rights — talk is clearly disconcerting to received habits of thought and traditions of social action. The essays in this, and the companion volume, suggest in diverse contexts that what is problematic is not so much the enunciative explosion of rights, but our reluctance to encounter it with means other than intellectual or moral fatigue, well-bred cynicism and alienating (and alienated) ethical critique." This thought is captured differently when he writes now : – "To give language to pain, to experience the pain of the Other inside you, remains the task, always, of human rights narratology. If the varieties of postmodernisms help us to accomplish this, there is a better future for human rights; if not, they constitute a dance of death for all human rights."

Any reflection on the contemporary forms of struggles for emancipation cannot afford to ignore the emergence of a wide range of positions well taken and whose relationship with the rights dialogues of the past itself are problematic. Several issues of human rights are apparently resolved. The enormous amount of literature, on these wideranging positions and to a large extent propelled by the liberation issues of the female is reflective both of the strains on human reason and its great capacity. These aspects come under Baxi's scan in the following words: "An alternative reading of histories, towards which this work hopes to make modest contribution, insists that the ordinary authors of human rights are people in struggle and communities of resistance. The pluralization of claims to "authorship" contests all human rights patrimonies, and interrogates the distinction between the forms of "progressive" and "regressive" Eurocentrism. .... We also, thus, discover the truth that to the tasks of realization of human rights all people, and all nations, arrive as equal strangers: and that from the standpoint of the rightless and suffering peoples everywhere all societies remain underdeveloped/developing."

In the concluding part of the preface, two seminal warnings are voiced, one the trade related, market friendly human rights paradigm subverting the paradigm of universal human rights of human beings, and two, technosciences, as codification of new material practices of power. In a significant echo of Marxist language, Baxi holds, "the task now is not merely to understand these developments but to transform these in directions more compatible with competing notions of human right future".

The book however presents a valiant attempt to draw a bridge between the narratives in the preface and the discourses in the rest. It appears to me that while the book is like a ship with ever regenerating sails, it is informed by a



constant struggle with the proposition in postmodernity, that, "the idea of history as a single unified process which moves towards the aim of human liberation is no longer credible (see Giani Battimo *The End of Modernity)* and the desperations of the human rights shopkeepers and street makers.

Baxi is equally alive to the truth that political philosophy has abandoned its classical vocation of exploring the theory and history of good society and has gradually deteriorated into behavioural political science and the doctrinaire of jurisprudence of rights. That is why like Costas Douzinas he is concerned, that "legal thinking has abandoned transcendence, has condemned natural law to the history of ideas, has tamed justice and has become an accountancy of rules."

The bewildering cacophony of human rights voices, sometimes through structured state institutions such as Courts presents another problem of adaptive repression and one begins to wonder whether in the everyday struggles and debates, human rights are at all a mistake. Douzinas catches the point thus : "as human rights start veering away from their initial revolutionary and dissident purposes as their end becomes obscured in ever more declarations, treaties and diplomatic lunches, we may be entering the epoch of the end of human rights and of the triumph of a monolithic humanity". The legitimation according to Baxi of extraordinary imposition of human suffering in the cause and the course of the contemporary forms of imperialism, is seen as a paradigm shift seeking to cancel the historic gains of the universal human rights movements. It is an appeal to convert diffidence of outcomes to detoxification of power centres. I find it however difficult to concur with Baxi when he suggests that the techno-scientific mode of production and the accompanying organic ideology threatens us all with the prospects of rendering contemporary human rights languages with obsolescence. If that is inevitably so, his endeavour to reflect on business ethics at the altar of human rights and to proclaim on the possibility of obligations, albeit by textual corrections of some of the contemporary United Nations norms, cannot be an enterprise in vain.

The book abounds in paraphrases rich in linguistic depth. They however will put off a first generation student of human rights or even a curious bystander. What he deals with under the subtitle 'The Dense Intertexuality of Norms' in chapter 9 of the book is precisely the problem encountered in his critical and sensitive endeavours to map a new point.

One school of thought proudly proclaimed dialectical materialism as the ultimate tool of all analysis. Its lofty claims are now part of the march of history. If human rights can claim to be a tribunal of history what political and ethical utopias have to be ever present is a challenge posed by Baxi. Will human nature ever awaken to itself?

The formidable challenges could have been posed by him in language and thought accessible to the laity.■

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Book News

Fiction

Islam Quintet by Tariq Ali captures the humanity and splendour of Muslim Spain in the first novel *Shadows of the Promeganate Tree*; the second novel *The Book of Saladin* is a rich teeming chronicle set in twelfth century Cairo, Damascus and Jersualem; the history of Iskinder Rasha's family mirrors the growing degeneration of the Ottoman Empire in the third novel *The Stone Woman* and the fourth *A Sultan of Palermo* is set in medieval Palermo.
Seagull, 1991, 1992, 1998 and 2005, pp. 242, 365, 274 and 246, Rs. 295.00, 325.00, 295.00 and 295.00 respectively.

General

The Running of the Bulls by Nicole Ridgway is the inside story of the cutthroat race from Wharton to Wall Street.
Penguin Portfolio, 2005, pp. 284, price not stated.

Historical Studies

Routine Violence: Nations, Fragments, Histories by Gyanendra Pandey is about the violence of ordinary times practised by legitimate states in the twentieth century.
Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 228, Rs. 595.00

Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny by Amartya Sen is a philosophical enquiry into the confusion arising out of the illusion of a unique identity which leads to hatred and violence in the world.
Allen Lane / Penguin Books, 2006, pp. 215, price not stated.

Memoirs

A Life Less Ordinary by Baby Halder and translated by Urvashi Butalia is the story of Baby Halder, a young woman who battled poverty, hardship and violence to make a name for herself as a writer.
Zubaan, Penguin, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 160, Rs. 195.00

Music

The Lost World of Hindustani Music by Kumar Prasad Mukherji is an elegy to a vanishing age of musical giants comprising many shared experiences between performer and audience, a salute to a world peopled by ustads, pandits, the rich and the famous, the sacred and the profane.
Penguin, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 354, Rs. 395.00

A Concise Dictionary of Hindustani Music by Ashok Ranade combines the thesarus and dictionary approaches to provide a musico-cultural profile which enables the reader to appreciate the larger map of Indian music.
Promilla & Co. in association with Bibliophile South Asia, New Delhi & Chicago, 2006, pp. 342, Rs. 695.00

South Asia Studies

Islam in History and Politics: Perspectives from South Asia edited by Asim Roy explores issues crucial to a holistic understanding of Islam and the global and local challenges and problems currently pressing Muslims all over the world.
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 224, Rs. 525.00

Strange Riches: Bengal in the Mercantile Map of South Asia by Rila Mukherjee presents a mix of historical and historiogaphic data of Bengal in an attempt to understand Bengal's economy and society through its short and long distance trade by caravans and through riverine ports.
Foundation Books, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 427, Rs. 695.00

Global Rivalries: From the Cold War to Iraq by Kees Van Der Pijl explores the history and development of relations between major countries in the international community.
Vistaar Publications, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 459, Rs. 650.00

Prospects for Peace in South Asia edited by Rafiq Dossani and Henry S. Rowen addresses the largely hostile, often violent relations between India and Pakistan from the time of their independence until the present when the prospect for peace seems to be more hopeful.
Orient Longman, Hyderabad, 2006, pp. 424, special Indian price Rs. 500.00

Retrieving an Iconic Text

Sumanyu Satpathy

SIX ACRES AND A THIRD
By Fakir Mohan Senapati. Translated by Ravi Sankar Mishra with an Introduction by S.P. Mohanty.
Penguin India, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 222, Rs. 250.00

Set in the early 19th century Orissa, the plot of the novel is seen by most critics as a critique of feudalism, upper-caste dominance and class oppression. In terms of style its contribution to the tradition of realism has dominated critical discussion. While all this is justifiable, the novel deserves a kind of intertextual approach that would place it firmly in the context of its production, and rescue its historicity from its much emphasized "literary" status.

By far the best-known novel by the most loved Oriya writer, Fakir Mohan Senapati (1843-1918), *Chha Mana Atha Guntha* (*Six Acres and a Third*) has lost none of its century-old popularity in Orissa. It first made its serialized appearance in the magazine *Utkal Sahitya* between 1897 and 1899, and was published in book form in 1902. Since then it has never been out of print. Recognized as the first novel of social realism in Oriya, it has been rendered into four translations in English, apart from those in several other Indian languages, one dramatized version (entitled *Champa* by Basanta Kumar Satpathy), and a film version. It has been the subject of endless critical debates, seminars, and symposia, and has always been part of school and university curricula. However, there seems to be a discrepancy between its unassailable status in Orissa and its neglect at the hands of scholars outside, especially by Indian comparatists, except for a couple of references by S.K. Das in his Sahitya Akademi volumes, stray lectures by the redoubtable Namwar Singh, as also an important essay by Amiya Dev. Another measure of its neglect is that even a thoroughgoing scholar of Das's calibre has called *Chha Mana* Fakir Mohan's second novel, and *Lachhama* the first.

In sharp contrast, novels like Bankimchandra Chatterjee's *Anandmath* and Premchand's *Godaan*, are household names, and are widely discussed, if only because of the high standard of research and close reading carried out by social scientists like Partha Chatterjee, Sudipta Kaviraj, Gyanendra Pandey and Vasudha Dalmia. Shifts in historiography have driven historians to look into non-objective discourses, and, foraying into interdisciplinarity, they have used these texts for imaginative reconstructions. One reason could be the unavailability of standard/well-edited translations of *Chha Mana*. In this sense, the simultaneous, high profile and hyped publication of the novel in India and the US augurs well for Fakir Mohan enthusiasts.

Chha Mana Atha Guntha is the story of how a cunning and mean zamindar, Ramachandra Mangaraj (Saanta) hoodwinks an innocent weaver couple of their precious plot of land (measuring six acres and thirty-two decimals, to be exact), and eventually meets his karma. Mangaraj, his mistress-maid, Champa, and her accomplice and eventual murderer, Gobinda representing the cunning and unscrupulous set, Mangaraj's pious but silent, nameless wife, simply called Saantani, the weaver couple, Bhagia, and Saria representing the innocent victims constitute the Manichaean cast of characters, supported by a string of minor but significant characters on either side. The retributive justice meted out to all the wrong doers in the novel are well thought out. Govinda slits Champa's throat with a sharp barber's razor. He himself dies a violent death in the jaws of a crocodile. Mangaraj dies a slow and painful death at the end of the novel. Though in its bare outline the story sounds grim, the novel, in most parts (at least in the first half) is a laugh riot. As Natabar Samantray a leading Oriya critic has pointed out, Fakir Mohan taught Oriyas laughter. Set in the early 19th century Orissa, the plot of the novel is seen by most critics as a critique of feudalism, upper-caste dominance and class oppression. In terms of style its contribution to the tradition of realism has dominated critical discussion. While all this is justifiable, the novel deserves a kind of intertextual approach that would place it firmly in the context of its production, and rescue its historicity from its much emphasized "literary" status.

Much, therefore, was expected of the latest translation and S.P. Mohanty's Introduction. While the team of translators deserves to be congratulated, the Introduction flatters to deceive. For one thing, it seems to be agenda-driven. Mohanty wants us to read the novel in a particular way rather than facilitating multiple readings. Instead of tracing the indigenous tradition of narrative technique on which Fakir Mohan builds, Mohnaty typically invokes Mulk Raj Anand and Salman Rushdie. When he does look at the regional models, he belabours the Lal Behari Day connection—itself a subject of a fine analysis by two of the translators elsewhere—instead of pursuing the comparison with Fakir Mohan's acknowledged model, Bankimchandra. As early as 1928, when modern Oriya criticism was at its infancy, the novelist's son, Mohini Mohan Senapati brought out an annotated edition of the novel, with an Introduction which is yet to be surpassed. One wishes Mohanty had referred to it in his own Introduction, but not unlike most other Fakir Mohan critics he refers to existing criticism by English academic critics, from John Boulton onwards.

What makes Fakir Mohan's realistic technique more complex than that of his predecessors is the uniqueness of the character of the narrator: witty, he laughs at the characters and constantly chats up the reader. Instead of pretending to be the unobtrusive, omniscient narrator, he keeps the reader on their toes all the time. From sounding tongue-in-cheek to being unabashedly ambiguous, he simply cannot be taken for granted. Understandably, Mohanty devotes much of his Introduction to the subject, and his analysis leads him to dub the narrator "touter," which he then goes to great lengths to explain. But the new theory falls flat, simply because the way that the term is used in common Oriya parlance is as difficult to convey to the non-Oriya as are many words and expressions in Fakir Mohan's narrative.

In one of the most touching scenes in the novel dealing with Saantani's death and Mangaraj's reaction to the calamity, the narrator is split between his two identities: he is often conscious of his own historicity as well as his fictive role as a witness to the action of the characters. When the narrator pushes himself into a situation where he is answerable to the question that he has himself led the reader to ask: "Was Mangaraj a penitent?" he can only say helplessly: "We are not omniscient. So who can answer the question?" But when it suits him, he can claim to be omniscient. ("We are, on account of being a *granthakar, sarvagnya*" [*sarvam jnanati iti sarvagnya*]) (my translation). It is interesting to note that the same narrator who in the beginning hesitates to assert empirical facts about Saanta's actions and takes recourse to the logic of cause and effect, is privy to the thoughts and visions of the dying Saanta

in the climactic parts of the novel, especially at the end.

Be that as it may, in what follows, I venture to offer an explanation for the long discursive passages on morality and the virtues of a wife I have referred to above. The narrator is conscious of the digressions and is apologetic about straying away from the main narrative. At one point he says, "Just as the dumb helplessly moves his limbs in order to express his thoughts, we too have spoken irrelevant things" (my translation). In the digressive passage in question, he seems to be engaged in a dialogue with contemporary discourses on issues of morality, wrong doing and repentance. Examples of such contemporary discourses and debates including the contributions of Fakir Mohan himself are to be found in the pages of the very magazine where the novel was first serialized. One such subject was the conduct of women, both unmarried girls and wives. Along with an essay on "The Rights of Girls," a review of books like *Lilabati* or *About Mothers and Daughters* appeared in the same issue in which Fakir Mohan's piece on Patanajali's *Yogasastra* (in which Fakir Mohan analyses issues of yoga and repentance).

In the miscellaneous section of the magazine the reviewer says, "One can find in the book about mothers and daughters much useful advice befitting the conduct of young Oriya girls" (my translation). These current discourses clearly have a bearing on Fakir Mohan's characterization of Saantani and Saria. Oriya critics who have pointed out certain traits in Saantani's character such as meekness and silence, as also a readiness on her part to resist injustice that is meted out to the poor and downtrodden, seem quite oblivious of the sources, ignoring as they do the then emergent culture of producing conduct books, along the lines that were already available in England, and in Bengal.

One would have expected Mohanty to remedy the situation. Instead, he merely recycles hackneyed Fakir Mohan criticism with sophisticated theoretical packaging. Discussing, the subject of Saantani's meekness, he says that, "Together with the image of the labouring poor who produce social value but are oppressed and exploited, the ideal of quiet virtue that Saantaani and Mukunda represent provides genuine insight into the positive vision of Fakir Mohan's intriguing novel" (p.14). One is hard put to understand this intriguing observation by Mohanty ("insight" into "vision"). One finds the observation that Rabi Sankar Mishra, one of the co-translators, makes elsewhere more useful. Mishra cogently argues how Fakir Mohan "foregrounds the goodness of a social structure through Saantani." This placing of the text firmly in its social context is a more perspicuous than a forced reading of it as a critique of class structure. But of course Mishra draws unreasonable conclusions, as he does not go far enough into the context of the novel's production, as I have just shown. Also, he does not go into Fakir Mohan's introduction of more empowered women characters such as Sulochona and the mother of Ananta in his wellknown short stories.

An unwillingness to look into these contexts not only renders the Introduction anemic, it occasionally mars the translation project too. I shall cite here a couple of instances. The first chapter of the novel itself reveals Fakir Mohan's interest and engagement in a whole range of discourses on modernity: science, justice, constructions of history and so on. The shadow of the essay form is never far from Fakir Mohan's narrative. For someone who began his writing career as a writer/translator of short biographies, it was perhaps natural that some of the chapters in the novel bear the mark of the genre: Saanta, Saria, Dildar Miaan, and Champa, for example. As can be seen in the neighbouring pieces in the pages of *Utkal Sahitya* where the novel was serialized, writers and contributors were all concerned about what constitutes proper behaviour, virtues, that might lead to the uplift of the Oriya *jati* vis-à-vis neighbouring Bengal. The latter in itself is a huge subject, and space does not permit me to go into the details of how the emergent educated middle class were borrowing freely from their Bengali counterparts certain ideals and models and forms of conduct.

One or two examples from the same issue of the magazine would suffice, and would show Fakir Mohan's narrative to be porous to the extreme. Shyam Sunder Nanda's brief biography of Benjamin Franklin appeared in the inaugural issue of *Utakal Sahitya*. He referred to Franklin's frugality more than once. Several numbers later, Fakir Mohan too refers to Benjamin Franklin in connection with the narrator's Polonius-like determination to be brief, and frugal while delineating Mangaraj's miserliness. He says, "to recount (all the wondrous events in Mangaraj's life) would take a lot of paper and a lot of time.... We follow here a principle of economics laid down by the great pundit Benjamin Franklin, which we interpret thus: it is easier to buy paper from the market than to put it to proper use" (p.40). Similarly, in the same paper a moral discourse on human problems had appeared. Here the writer quotes from the Bible: "No man can serve two masters" which he then translates into Oriya. Fakir Mohan while arguing with the help of mock-logic the absence of cow-dung in the weavers' quarter quotes this very line. Again, in one of the 1873 issues of *Utkal Deepika* (under the rubric *Vividh Sambad*), the following news item about the crocodile menace in the river Budhabalanga had appeared: "Another crocodile has started snapping at men and other creatures. It might cause harm to people, for men generally bathe and have to cross the river in ferries..." It is possible that Fakir Mohan who was actively involved in the affairs of the newspaper, recalls the news reports when he sets about describing the crocodile menace in his novel to prepare the reader for Gobinda's end in the crocodile infested river Birupa: "The traveller...jumped into the river. Hardly had he swum a few arms of distance, when a Gomuhan crocodile came from nowhere and snapped him by its jaws, and the bundle (of jewellery) was swept away by the river current" (my translation).

Apart from these curiosities, the novel is replete with dialogisms of a more serious kind. In a different context, Kaviraj has pointed out how the land-holding as well as business jargon under Bengal Presidency was all drawn from Persian. Since Orissa was in Fakir Mohan's time a part of the Presidency, he shared the anxiety of the Urdu-Hindi belt in northeastern India no less with regard to the exploitative power of Urdu/Persian. I am referring to the well-known views of Bharatendu Harishchandra, who exclaims: "what wonders cannot be performed through their medium (by which) (B)lack can be changed into white and white into black...!" Surely Fakir Mohan was hinting at a similar practice, when he put the following words in a character's mouth, "Some BA, MA qualified babu might complain, 'Alas! Mian has become a landlord merely by writing his name backward ("*olata kalamare*" in Oriya, or "*ulti kalamse*" in Hindi, an obvious allusion to the Persian script), but we who write long essays, plying the pen in the right direction ("*salakha kalamare*" in Oriya, or "*sidi kalamse*" in Hindi), continue to starve!'" (my translation). Through this jibe by the witty/wily narrator, Fakir Mohan was perhaps here expressing the common suspicion, even complaint, that because most Oriyas did not have access to the language of land transaction, mortgage, and loan etc., they were swindled out of their possessions. Thus, the four translators have completely missed the point of the entire historical context by translating the passage I have quoted above thus. "Alas, Ali Mian, who could not even hold a pen properly, became a zamindar just by writing his name. Even though we can write long essays and hold a pen correctly, we starve." Among the other options one had, are "holding the pen upside down" or "holding the pen straight". But here the translation cannot afford to be literal, cannot afford to miss the ideological angle. Nuri Mishra translates the same sentence thus: "He could earn thousands only by signing his name, but people who could write long essays were not able to feed themselves properly."

Another instance of faulty translation for want of adequate attention to context and lack of research on the part of the translators is the allusion to the famous *Bijuli* controversy.

This again is a long story, which I shall briefly outline here. In the 1890s a needless controversy over the relative merit of the 18th century poet, Upendra Bhanja (notorious for erotic descriptions in his kavyas) and Fakir Mohan's friend Radhanath Ray had erupted. An ephemeral little magazine called *Bijuli* had staunchly spoken up for Radhanath Ray. Details can be found in the well-researched novelistic cultural history by J.P. Das, *Desh, Kaal, Patra* (English translation by J.K. Nayak forthcoming). In his novel, Fakir Mohan engages in a dialogue with the protagonists of this controversy, when he sets out to describe Champa's beauty. At one point the narrator exclaims: "We dare not proceed any further. Perhaps Bijuli will flash again." Since the practice of italicization in Oriya print simply did not exist (nor does it now), some Oriya readers might have missed the allusion to the controversy, but the English translators too have ensured that the lines appear totally meaningless to the readers. Bijuli literally means lightening. "*Chamakijibe*" means both "flash" and "will be alarmed." Obviously, the narrator has taken advantage of the pun and expects his contemporary readers to have a little fun. The suggestion comes from the honorific "*jibe*" instead of "*jiba,*" which latter ties up with the literal "bijuli". *Jibe* ties up with the critics supporting the paper *Bijuli*. Latter-day readers can be pardoned for missing the allusion, but not the battery of four translators, who translate the line simply as "Perhaps Bijuli will flash again," without italics and a footnote. The dual character of the narrator, historic and fictional, is best illustrated here.

One of the minor editorial blemishes is that there is no mention of previous translations. These are by C.V.N. Das (1967), B.M. Senapati and A.M. Senapati (1967), Nuri Mishra (1969). The second is out of print; and since I haven't seen it, I cannot comment on it. The first one is a reinvention of the novel by an anglophile, and cannot strictly be called a translation. The third one is a slightly abridged version. However, there exists what I consider to be a highly competent translation of one long and grim chapter of the novel by K.M. Acharya (*Modern Indian Literature: An Anthology*. Ed K.M. George. Vol II. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi 1993. pp 769-775.) In spite of some infelicities, the translation succeeds in creating the same kind of atmosphere as a reading of the original Oriya provides. At least in one instance he scores over the present translation. When Gopi Sahu fails to sell anything for a few hours in the morning, he blames it on the inauspicious faces he had seen in the morning. When he later finds spendthrift customers, he wonders whose face he had seen in the morning. Acharya sticks to this original sequence. The translation under review drops the first reference. It is not a harmless omission since Fakir Mohan exposes relentlessly all superstitions, and one such superstition regarding the ill-augury of the day at the sight of a barren woman is used by Champa to convince Saria about the importance of sacrificing her land to save herself from such ignominy.

What is often not noticed by translators is that the "Oriya" of the novel is itself not easily accessible to the early 21st century Oriya reader. One supposes it was no less difficult for the 1928 reader, if the glossary provided there by the novelist's son is any indication. The many words and phrases that Fakir Mohan uses are now obsolete, and are totally lost to the Oriya language. Unless one goes to Gopal Praharaj's multi-volume lexicon, these words and phrases, some of which are either Persian, or legalese, or too local, or are simply jargon from maritime activities, cannot be traced in most standard Oriya dictionaries. As a result, even the Oriya editions are heavily glossed. On a rough count, in the first 10 chapters, as many as 170 such words and phrases have been glossed in a popular edition. And there are 28 chapters in all. One is not counting the many Sanskrit verses and *slokas*, from Kalidasa and *Hitopodesha* and other Sanskrit treatises, and many other Hindi/Urdu, and English words, allusions to the Bible, and so on, and not even counting other cultural institutions which have disappeared from popular Oriya imagination, especially the neo-urbanite. Surprisingly enough, the translators do not seem to have felt the need for extensive annotation. I have already pointed out two or three instances. But even more glaring omissions are the absence of notes on "Nabata" and "Anasar" and so on, in fact the latter is wrongly translated as "sick room" of Lord Jagannath, which no one can make any sense of without a note. The original text carries references to kinds of crocodiles such as *gomuha* and *dadhiani gadihala*, among many others, which are either omitted in the translation, or appear without any gloss. One of the inexcusable translations is "basil leaves" for tulsi, now a widely understood term. Basil simply loses the sacredness of tulsi. For many non-Oriya Indian readers "Collyrium" for "kajal" almost replicates Senapati's parodic "glosses" of simple words and phrases into difficult Sanskrit phrases by way of explanation in his autobiography. The publishers ought to have paid some attention to the blurb, which serves to put off the prospective reader. In spite of it, this is a must read early Indian novel in English translation for the lay as well as specialist readership. For, all said and done, the translators have done a commendable job in retrieving one of the iconic Indian novels from relative obscurity, and placing it center stage. It is now ready with a new lease of life for a fresh round of critical-historical attention.■

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"Magical Mystery Tour"

Arshia Sattar

THE CARAVAN (SARTHA)
By S.L. Bhyrappa. Translated from the Kannada by S. Ramaswamy
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 292, Rs. 395.00

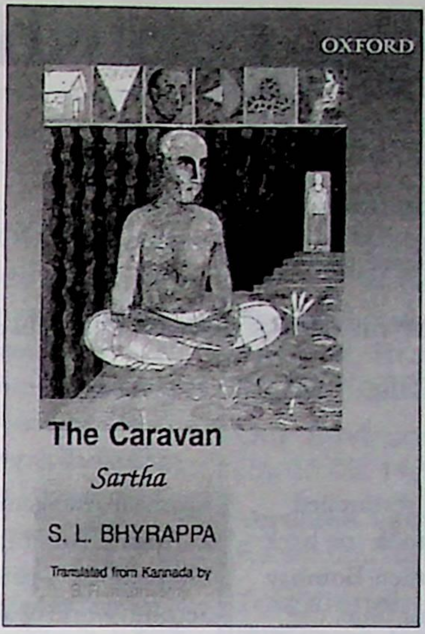
S.L. Bhyrappa is one of Kannada's most prolific and popular writer, having won several literary awards within and without the state. Outside Karnataka, he may be known more from his novels that were made into films during the 1970s, including *Vamsavriksha* (directed by Girish Karnad and B.V. Karanth) and *Tabbaliyu Ninade Magane* which was made into *Godhuli* (directed by B.V. Karanth). This was a time when the parallel cinema movement was at its height and literary works from several regional languages appeared on the national screens, allowing us a glimpse into other worlds and other languages. The Sahitya Akademi has worked hard for decades at moving Indian literatures from one language to another, but it was not until the early 1990s that private Indian publishers took on translations as a concerted enterprise. The translation was funded by the MR. AR. Educational Society whose stated aim is to "sponsor Indian literature."

Sartha follows the first person adventures of Nagabhatta, a brahmin, who lived in the tumultuous and pluralistic 8th century, a magnificent and polyphonic period in which to set a novel: a time when early Muslim traders had arrived on the west coast of the sub-continent (though Arab trade was much older), when Buddhism was a vibrant and living tradition in intellectual contact and contention with the newly formulated Hindu philosophies of *Dvaita* and *Advaita,* and *tantric* practices (both Hindu and Buddhist) as well as cults of complete renunciation (*sannyasa),* provided heterodox counterpoints and alternatives. Trade flourished and urban centres throbbed with economic prosperity and cultural and religious diversity. Placing Nagabhatta's story in this historical period, Bhyrappa also calls upon legends and oral and literary apocrypha: there is a king Amaru in whose name the wonderful erotic Sanskrit verses, (*Amaru Sataka),* are composed, the philosophers Kumarila Bhatta and Sankara and their legendary debate and the dominance of Nalanda as a locus of learning. There are literary echoes as well: character of the courtesan-performer Chandrika recalls Sudraka's immortal Vasantasena as well as Bhagvati Charan Varma's more recent *Chitralekha.*

Bhyrappa does well by his chosen setting in terms of bringing together historical and intellectual detail as well as a sense of a society in flux, where many ways of being and thinking jostled for attention and canonization. Briefly, the story is as follows — Nagabhatta is sent off by his friend, a king named Amaru, to follow the fortunes of a caravan (*sartha*) so that the king may learn more about how the state can enter trade. Nagabhatta is "in disguise" in that he poses as a scholar on his way to Nalanda. The trading caravan disbands under threat of unfair trade practices from Arab gangs and Nagabhatta finds himself in Mathura. He joins a theatrical company and plays the lead role of Krishna in their productions. He meets the lovely leading lady Chandrika, for whom he develops an undying attachment that consists of equal parts of lust and respect. Their on-again-off-again relationship forms the thread of the narrative as Nagabhatta travels, both outwardly as well as inwardly, through trial and tribulation, doubt and fleeting certainty, until they are both transformed by harsh experience and are happily reunited.

To present *Sartha* as merely a love story would be unfair. Bhyrappa uses Nagabhatta's adventures to fully explore the complex world of the 8th century. He sends his bewildered protagonist on what could best be described as a "magical mystery tour" where he has encounters and makes choices that explore the wealth of religious, social and intellectual options that were available. Not only does Nagabhatta take on the persona of a leading actor, he dabbles in *tantricism,* finds and loses love and *gurus,* contends with the metaphysical truths of Buddhism, listens as his teacher, the great *dvaitin* Kumarila Bhatta, is defeated by the effulgent young Sankara in debate and then finds that Sankara has, through an unsanctioned use of his *yogic* powers, taken on the body of the dead king so as to experience sexual pleasures (the moment from which the *Amaru Sataka* allegedly arises). Meanwhile, Nagabhatta also realizes that the same dead king, his childhood friend, Amaru, had betrayed him, sending him off with the caravan so that he could seduce the absent traveller's wife. The climax of this roller coaster life is in the hands of ghastly and brutal Muslim lords who threaten the destruction of an unnamed sun temple in the western regions of the subcontinent and torture and rape the innocent. It is in this somewhat overwrought climax that Bhyrappa's politics seem to get in the way of his history: his historical allusions (thus far reasonably accurate) seem to jump several centuries to the documented and subsequently, communally fraught destruction of the temple at Somanthpur by the aggressive Mahmud of Ghazni in the early 11th century.

Sartha is an interesting novel, if somewhat rambling. Nagabhatta never really grabs the reader, the end of his spiritual journey being



somewhat predictable. But as mentioned before, the setting of the novel is hugely interesting and Bhyrappa is able to demonstrate his familiarity with philosophy, history and anthropology. Ramaswamy's translation is lucid, though he seems to be in awe of what he perceives as his writer's genius. Oxford has adopted an interesting orthographic principle in that non-English words appear in italics only the first time they are used. One would imagine that this is to mitigate the "alien" nature of the text, naturalizing unfamiliar words and concepts within the translated text itself.

Sartha is accompanied by a substantial Introduction by the translator, S. Ramaswamy, which provides a linguistic and literary history of Kannada, dwelling largely on the language's antiquity and its classical works. There is passing mention of the Navya movement, which surely deserved more in terms of discussion and analysis. The modern period is dealt with rather briefly, which is a little hard to understand if the point is to locate Bhyrappa among his peers and in his writing milieu. In 2004, when the UPA government declared Tamil to be a "classical" language, hackles rose in Karnataka, with some intellectuals and language activists (including Jnanapith winner U.R. Ananthamurthy), claiming that a similar classical status be bestowed upon Kannada by the Central Government. And now, in 2006, as we approach the golden jubilee of the formation of Karnataka as a state, the same voices are being raised in chorus around the same issue. Perhaps Ramaswamy's Introduction has an axe to grind. Nevertheless, it is a relatively reasonable (if painstaking) early history of the language, its development and its literary treasures.

One has to wonder, though, if this same Introduction will precede every OUP publication of translations from contemporary Kannada literature. Or, will other Kannada translators be able to situate their chosen works differently. Will literary translations from other Indian languages published by OUP carry similar historical Introductions? It would certainly be an interesting (if contestable), project for a single publishing house to "set" the historical development of Indian languages by letting translators write these essays as introductions — especially since all translators are not linguistic historians or vice versa.

In any event, the more translations there are that bring the wealth of Indian literatures into English the better. There is no other way to counter the absurd proposition that India's better writing lies in English.■

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Chronicling a Publishing House

Suguna Ramanathan

EMPIRES OF THE MIND: A HISTORY OF THE OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS IN INDIA UNDER THE RAJ
By Rimi B. Chatterjee
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006, pp.450, Rs. 795.00

Reading this extremely well researched and lucidly written study took me back to the 1950s in what was then Bombay when small volumes bound in dark blue, the World's Classics, were there to be bought, and one wondered in one's ignorance whether the motto on the crest was to be read downwards (Dominus illuminatio mea) or across (Dommina nustio illumea!). Thacker's Bookshop was just across the road from Elphinstone College, and Taraporevala's down Hornby Road, darker, mustier, but full of treasures. Hours of pleasurable browsing. Hours too of study. Who would have thought that H.G, Rawlinson, whose history of India was our school textbook, and Vincent Smith, who was recommended reading, would figure so largely in this study? I had no idea then that they had any existence outside the examination for which I was preparing myself.

This is a very impressive volume and not only because it generated nostalgia waves in this reader. Rarely does a doctoral thesis evince simultaneously such a sense of style, so much feeling for the excitement emerging from long forgotten business letters, so sure a grasp of a huge mass of material, and so clear an understanding of the way an ancient university press (which "is not and has never been a commercial institution") came to terms with both business ventures and empire building. The study moves from the 15th century when the first volume was printed in Oxford through a Royal Charter that permitted the setting up of a press and the printing of Bibles; the Clarendon Press which was in fact the Oxford University Press under another name; the tussle in Victorian times for 'pure' scholarship (Mark Pattison) and influential saleable titles (Benjamin Jowett), the establishing of branch offices and their complex financial arrangements with the mother house at Amen Corner in London and later Amen House, OUP's petering out in India after the Second World War, and finally, the vibrant revival 30 years after Independence to its position of strength as a leading academic publisher in India today.

A word about the readership for this volume. It is meant primarily for those interested in the history of publishing in English in India, including English Literature scholars engaged in the sociology of the text, an increasing tribe in this country. It is also of interest to students of the Raj. But the excellent writing, the apt epigraphs to each chapter, the closing words of each chapter all reveal, even as the facts are marshalled meticulously, a finely tuned mind that both rejoices in quirky human behaviour, and responds to the sadness and poetry implicit in time passing and the vanishing of things and persons. Thus the general reader, anyone with an interest in books, may well enjoy the goings on of famous writers and scholars, the old boys̓ approach of the Oxford Delegates (the equivalent of a Board of Directors), and the canny stewardship of Indian publishers and booksellers. OUP's relationships with Macmillan and Longmans, already established in India, the decisions taken by OUP men travelling in India to survey the lie of the land, the modernization of the operations of the press and a hundred other matters are recounted in scrupulous detail with plenty of archival support.

What did OUP publish and for whom? Chatterjee tells us that it was, to start with, primarily for readers in Britain, those who were coming out to India or those who had left India after their stints with the army and civil service. When faced with a manuscript by a person whom they did not know (for example, S. Radhakrishan), the first question the Delgates invariably asked was not "Is he politically acceptable" or "Will it sell?" but "Is he a scholar?" The Sacred Books of the East, a lavish and expensive series edited by Max Muller, found the market it did because of the prestige not only of its scholar editor but the Press itself. The Rulers of India series proved, if not a thumping commercial success, 'not bad.' The list of titles in that series provided by Chatterjee for the year 1894— a jumble of English statesmen and Indian rulers (Clive, Dalhousie, Elphinstone, Munro, Amherst 'all stuck fast,' Akbar and Scindia with 'leading sales')—is instructive. Understandably, a contemporary letter refers to the underlying confusion: "Is (the catalogue) intended chiefly for Anglo-Indian book buyers, or for the native students at the various University colleges? —for English or native consumption?" (p.217). On what basis were the personages chosen? Personal affinity? If actual importance, then why Munro? The authorial expertise of amatuer writers perhaps? Or other driving impulses? Vincent Smith pours scorn over Rawlinson's motivation in wishing to write a book on Shivaji for the series: "As to Shivaji—Rawlinson being stationed in the Deccan, demeaned himself by trying to curry favour with the Marathas" (p. 285).

Then there were Hinduism primers for missionaries going out to India (Jane Eyre's cousin, St John Rivers, would have needed one!), works on contemporary systems useful to the India Office for purposes of administration, Tamil handbooks and dictionaries by one G.U. Pope (jocularly referred to as the 'papal works'), books of religious quest by India enthusiasts, among others titles.

Across the entire landscape strides quietly Humphrey Milford, OUP's publisher between 1913 and 1952, responsible for the strong presence of the firm in India. Apparently he and E.V. Rieu and R.W.Chapman (names familiar to Eng. lit students) would slip into Latin or Greek quotations to lighten their meetings, leaving others befuddled, much like Sir Humphrey Appleby and Bernard Woolly with poor Jim Hacker in the *Yes Minister* television series! Milford, we are given to understand, was all things to all men, reader, critic, businessman, chief executive, all rolled into one. But far more colourful are writers who either ranted about the advantages of imperial rule (like Vincent Smith), or raved about its injustices (like M.A. Macaulife).

Macaulife, we learn from Chatterjee, had translated the Sikh *Granth Sahib* (1908*)* and was now offering *The Sikh religion* to the Press. Unusually for those times, he identified passionately with his subject, affirming that the *Granth Sahib* was "the most difficult work, sacred or profane, that exists," requiring a knowledge of Sanskrit, Arabic, Multani, Marathi and Hindi. He was determined that his own work should satisfy, not just the sahibs who knew little, but Sikh gyanis themselves. He advertised in Sikh newspapers inviting the public to 'visit him and inspect and correct his manuscript' (p.261), starting a process that went on for month and a half of continuous editing and correcting. In his preface he railed against earlier translators patronized by the India Office, saying they were missionaries who had defamed the gurus and offended the Sikhs. The Press and the India Office (which was supporting the publication of Macaulife's work), did not know quite what to do with

This is a very impressive volume and not only because it generated nostalgia waves in this reader. Rarely does a doctoral thesis evince simultaneously such a sense of style, so much feeling for the excitement emerging from long forgotten business letters, so sure a grasp of a huge mass of material, and so clear an understanding of the way an ancient university press (which "is not and has never been a commercial institution") came to terms with both business ventures and empire building.

him; they thought that he was 'clearly rather dotty about the book.' Milford decided to let his strictures pass because "everyone will realize that Macaulife is an orthodox old Sikh himself." Macaulife improvised clever strategies of his own to market his book, urging the Press to send personalized letters to possible clients. The appeal in the letter to the Maharaja of Rewa is to his ancestral links with renowned Sikhs mentioned in the book; in the letter to the Maharaja of Kashmir reference is made to Guru Tegh Bahadur's sacrifices in saving Hindus under Aurangzeb at the request of Kashmiri Hindu pandits; while the attention of Scindhia of Gwalior is drawn to the fact that Guru Har Gobind, the sixth Guru, was imprisoned in the Gwalior fortress. Macaulife's interactions with people in both the OUP and the India Office, his strong personality and determination to take not a penny less than he thought was his due all make entertaining reading.

Vincent Smith is another character who figures prominently in the history of the Press. Made much of in Britain, Smith was very different from earlier British historians of India, who had attempted to be as neutral as possible in their social histories. But as the East India Company's possessions grew in number, they needed legitimation to dismantle the administration of the old Mughal Empire, and secondly knowledge about the people coming under their rule in increasing numbers. There was a demand for histories with a rhetoric disguised as disinterested scholarship. In 1900 along comes Vincent Smith, retiring from service in the North-West Frontier Provinces, returning to England, and writing his version of the history of India. Chatterjee, noting Vincent Smith's 'imperial sermonizing,' says he had a 'deep and unshakeable belief in the moral and historical rightness of the Raj' (p. 281). His *Early History of India*, published in 1904 was, within two years of publication, essential reading on the lists of Indian universities. The proofs of his updated version of 1917 were sent to S. Rangaswamy Aiyar, a historian in Madras, and came back with a long list of strictures regarding offensive language and factual inaccuracies. The fulminations of Smith on receiving such criticism from a 'native' reader are entertaining indeed (p.285).

Chatterjee takes account of OUP's diminishing energy after World War II, and its inability to take advantage of the huge amount of excellent scholarship emerging from Indians (D. D. Kosambi, A. R. Desai, for instance). Indian writers, it seems, found smaller publishers less intimidating, and as OUP's fortunes declined in India, those of Indian publishers, who worked long hours with a skeleton staff rose. OUP in India now took up school texts and reprints off U.K. lists. Jim Corbett and Verrier Elwin were indeed published by OUP but on a personal basis, as the friends of Jack Hawkins, who had replaced E.V. Rieu in India. And the great Milford retired in 1945. Only in the 70s under Ravi Dayal did change come in; the Indian branches acquired their own lists and made their own policies. The severing of the umbilical cord seems to have given new life to the Press in India, synonymous today with excellent academic publishing of the highest standard. The present work is an example of that standard; the OUP looks into a mirror of its own making.

One needs to ask how the history of publishing houses, their appearance on the scene, their choices, and strategies reflect the tide of the times. In this case, there seems to have been, if not quite an equitable to and froing between Englishmen and Indians (more to than fro), at least a complex relationship between the rulers and ruled, an absorbing of ideas from both by both. Usually, the subject always knows more—knowing both herself and the master. But there are instances here of amateur scholars who fell in love with this or that aspect of the alien land they ruled and went away to their homes in Cheltenham or Bournemouth or wherever to sigh, and remember, and write. By the same token, Indian writers quickly picked up the tools that came from Britain, mastered them and turned the tables on the British, using their very ideas, concepts, arguments. In this exchange, the OUP, according to Rimi Chatterjee, played its part.

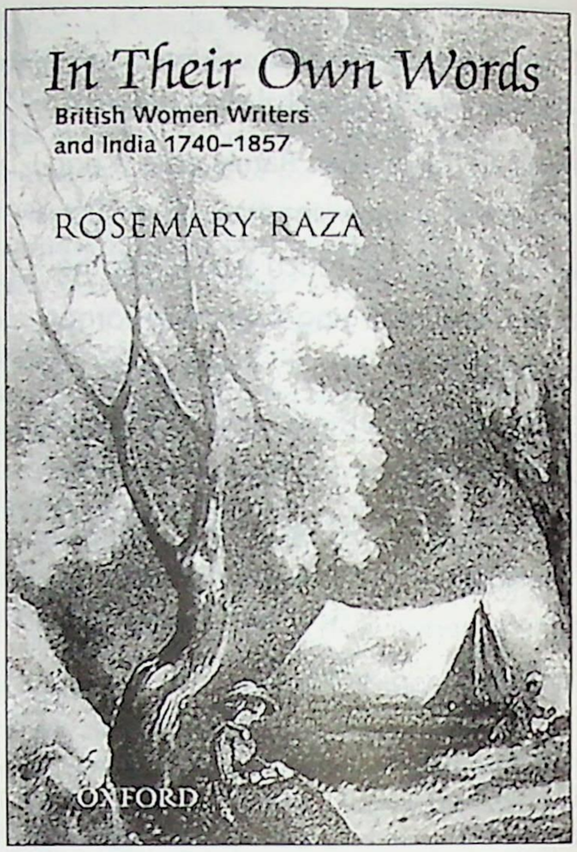
An excellent work by any standard. I recommend it highly to general reader and specialist alike.■

Suguna Ramanathan taught English for many years at St Xavier's College, Ahmedabad. Publications include critical studies of Iris Murdoch (1990) and C. P. Snow (1978), both published by The Macmillan Press, London. She is co-author of *Journeys to Freedom: Dalit Narratives* (Calcutta: Samya 2004), one of the editors of *The Silken Swing: The Cultural Universe of Dalit Women* (Calcutta: Stree, 2000), and translator, in collaboration, of *Modern Gujarati Poetry: a selection* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1990). Her novel *The Evening Gone* was published in 2001 by Penguin, India.

Debunking Historical Stereotypes

Eunice de Souza

IN THEIR OWN WORDS: BRITISH WOMEN WRITERS AND INDIA 1740-1857
By Rosemary Raza
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 289, Rs. 595.00



The memsahib as arrogant, snobbish, exclusive, is one of numerous stereotypes we have been saddled with since the end of colonialism in India. There are plenty of others, including the idea that Macaulay forced English and English studies down the throats of Indians. British colonialism in India has been treated as a monolith, with little suggestion of varied voices, attitudes, achievements. Selective quotation, serious omissions of historical facts, all in the name of postcolonial studies. Fortunately, at least where British women of the colonial period are concerned, a number of books have appeared since the seventies which attempt to set the record straight. One of the earlier ones is Pat Barr's *The Memsahibs,* subtitled In Praise of the Women of Victorian India (1976). For her, the "historical clichés have little substance," and she attempts (and succeeds) in imbuing us with a "certain measure of respect, affection and understanding that is always aroused when one starts to read between the lines of any great human adventure."

Rosemary Raza's *In Their Own Words*, subtitled British Women Writers and India 1740-1857 is the most recent book to attempt to deal with false historical stereotypes. "In film, radio, television, and literature," she writes in her introduction, "postcolonial political correctness has delighted in portraying the womenfolk of the civilian and military elite as quaint reactionaries.....historians, novelists, and social commentators of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were often equally dismissive." While Pat Barr based her chapters on individuals, Raza's approach is thematic, and covers writing, certainly, but also aspects of domestic and social life, and the part played, or allegedly played by British women in maintaining/exacerbating British authority. Women's writings played a key role in reflecting and shaping the views of their fellowmen in India and in Britain. Some of the travel writing is well-known, but there was also the writing of medical and faith missionaries, educationists, advice to newcomers, memorials to husbands, history, translation, children's literature, novels, plays, poems, and contributions to newspapers and journals. Almost all these women writers lived in India, but there were also a few who lived in Britain but wrote on the basis of information and impressions derived from friends and relations who had lived in India.

According to Raza, criticism of British women in India has arisen for various reasons. Central to this criticism is "the effect of the growing presence of British women on relations with Indians…Women stand accused of establishing barriers rather than crossing boundaries." One error of judgment is that all of them were assumed to be memsahibs, and the memsahib was seen as representative of all British women. In reality, many of the women who came to India in the 19th century were working class women, and missionaries who did not come from the same class backgrounds as the mems. Jemima Kindersley, who married an army officer in 1762 came from an uneducated working-class background. Maria Jewbury came from a background of cotton manufacturing in Midlands. Most missionaries were from educated middle-class backgrounds, below the ranks of the gentry and professions. The very young were usually sent to Britain for their education. The old retired there. Women from aristocratic backgrounds often came with their husbands who were appointed to the highest posts for a short time. Secondly, criticism of these women "largely relates to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the imperial high noon which still retained scarred memories of the sepoy rebellion….A critical and unsympathetic perception of them… has been reflected back onto an earlier age. But is this fair? From the point of view of women's history, the early colonial period has not been looked at separately, and its characteristics require disentangling from what succeeded it."

Raza says that the first known publication by a woman in India came in 1743, when Jane Smart's letter to her son describing the visit she and her two daughters had paid to the 'Nabob' of Madras was published in London. Letters home, and diaries and journals provided the "basic element of women's literary output, and was not only the first but a continuing bridge to the world of published literature." Women, in fact, had a special role to play as they had access to secluded Indian women, and a visit to a zenana formed an important part of their communications. Letter-writing helped to create other forms as "the qualities it demanded—a personal tone, lightness of touch, vivacity, deft treatment of themes—could be used to advantage in other forms of literature which were now being demanded." Charlotte Speir, who spent some years in Calcutta with her husband used these qualities in her *Life in Ancient India* in 1856, a popular version of history drawn from authoritative scholarly sources. Two of the earliest women novelists to give a realistic picture of contemporary India, Raza says had, ironically never set foot in India. One was Phebe Gibbes who wrote *Hartly House, Calcutta* (1789) and may have obtained her information from her son who worked in India, and Elizabeth Hamilton who wrote *Letters of a Hindu Rajah*, and was influenced by her soldier-scholar brother Charles Hamilton. Anne Elwood in the 1820s, Fanny Parks, Sophia Belnos were concerned about the lack of understanding of Hinduism and wrote, among other reasons to counter prejudices in this area. Women like Emma Roberts were capable of an "objectivity (which) enabled her to adopt at times an Indian perspective, casting the British in a surprising and unwelcome light." Some women "used the written word to warn of the dangers and impress on Anglo-Indians the need for more sensitive and acceptable behaviour." Briefly, "one of the most remarkable features of women's writing on India is how very varied, inconsistent and contradictory its tone was. The generous and enthusiastic spirit of enquiry which was marked up to the early decades of the nineteenth century began to peter out as a parallel dis-

course developed which was increasingly critical of Indian culture and achievement."

In relation to the central criticism that British women put up barriers to meeting Indians, Raza observes that the responsibility for this failure was not one-sided. "The Hindu caste system imposed restrictions which for long kept British and Hindus apart socially...... Except in the case of missionary wives, who targeted the Hindu community, the majority of encounters were between British and Muslim women, not only because dietary and social requirements were more easily negotiated, but because the greatest concentration of British soldiers and civilians was in the Muslim north and north-west." But despite all the restrictions on meeting Indian women, "a number of determined and resourceful British women began to do so." Fanny Parks, perhaps the best known of these spoke Hindustani "and prided herself on her knowledge of the correct etiquette to be adopted in the zenana." Marianne Postans spoke Cutchi, Hindustani, Sindhi and Persian, and, while in Bombay, mixed with Parsi, Armenian, and Jewish ladies. Both Lena Login and Mrs. Meer Hasan Ali learnt Persian. Helen Mackenzie, who arrived in India in 1846 became close to the wives of her husband's colleagues from the Afghan campaign.

In addition to discussing the writings of British women in India, Rosemary Raza also discusses their domestic lives, the family, the architecture of their homes, servants, Eurasians, and activities of the women including portrait painting. Her approach throughout is "the traditional approach of the historian." She has not used, and did not wish to use any particular theoretical perspective because of "the danger of embedding discussion within a particular theory lies in the tendency to select material to suit the conclusions required." In relation to writing by women she uses the written word, she says, "as a vehicle for conveying information, and not for its literary qualities, except in so far as these were thought, at the time, to favour women authors."

In Their Own Words is a book for the general reader. While some aspects of the worlds she describes are familiar, the interest is in the detail Raza provides, the short but telling quotes, and the extent of the work she covers. There are thorough biographical notes at the end, and an extensive and useful bibliography. One very minor reservation: The title of the book suggests an anthology of selections from the writings of British women, rather than a re-working of a doctoral thesis from Oxford.■

Eunice de Souza retired as Head of the Department of English, St Xavier's College, Mumbai where she taught for more than thirty tears. She is a poet and novelist, and has edited anthologies of writing in India in the 19th and early 20th centuries. She has also written for children.

A Rich and Poignant Life

Barnita Bagchi

FRAGMENTS OF A LIFE: A FAMILY ARCHIVE
By Mythili Sivaraman
Zubaan, New Delhi, 2006, pp. xxi+207, Rs. 395.00

Mythili Sivaraman has written an outstanding book. It is moving, angry, grounded in the everyday, and speaks, in true democratic spirit, to the common reader (its subject, Subbalakshmi, was one such avid, intelligent reader) and to academic specialists in history and women's studies. Its focus is Sivaraman's grandmother, the aforementioned Subbalakshmi, who lived from c. 1897 to 1978, in a Tamil Brahmin milieu.

The title of the book might equally and aptly have been 'Shards of a Life'; we have a powerful sense of jagged, sharp edges in the life of a woman who spent the long last years of her life in the throes of mental illness, who could not realize her cherished wish of going to Shantiniketan and having her daughter educated there, another of whose impossible dreams was to live in South Africa as an activist working for and with indentured Indian labourers there. Perpetually deferred, the dreams that surcharged her being eventually turned to nightmare; her epilepsy, which, Sivaraman point out, could have been treated had her husband chosen to use western medicine instead of spurning it, eventually contributed to the trauma of her unhappy sixties and seventies, a trauma that grieved and tried her daughter, Sivaraman's mother, who nonetheless cared for Subbalakshmi lovingly.

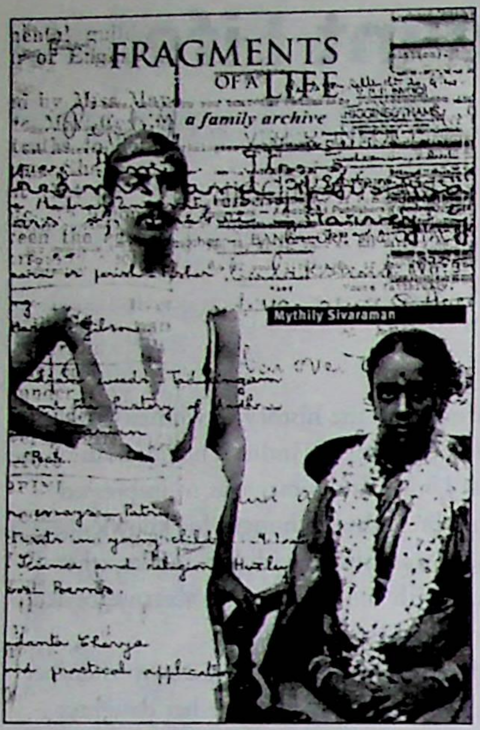
Yet one of the major contributions of Sivaraman's book is that it doggedly resists writing Subbalakshmi's life in either triumphalist or tragic terms; as distinguished historian of the everyday Uma Chakravarti points out in her excellent 'Afterword: The Blue Tin Trunk', Sivaraman's rescues the life of Subbalakshmi, which could not be an active part of the Indian freedom struggle, from what E.P. Thompson called 'the famous condescension of history'.

Subbalakshmi, in any case, was in no way amenable to such attempts at condescension, during her life, even though she was, we can say forthrightly, oppressed in multiple ways. She was clearly an outstandingly intelligent woman; devoid of formal education, her dauntingly ambitious intellectual effort to read and educate herself is mind-boggling. From Einstein's works to Edgar Snow, from Rabindranath Tagore to Buddhist literature, from Freud to the Bengal School of Art, the reading-lists of hers that we have would have been enough to merit several long articles on the history of women's reading in early 20th century India. The librarian of the Madras University library was so impressed with her breadth and hunger for knowledge that he corresponded with her and kept her supplied with the many, often abstruse books she requested from the library.

Subbalakshmi put her foot down when her marital family refused to have her daughter Pankajam (Sivaraman's mother) educated in school; she took her daughter and lived with her brother's family in Madras, got her educated in school, but could not prevent her daughter from being denied higher education. For Pankajam, this act of her mother's taking her to Madras remained heroic, and in the difficult last years of her mother's life, she was at pains to remember what her mother had done to give her schooling.

Sivaraman's book is exemplary in the way that it constantly keeps in mind the methodological framework and difficulties behind the work in focus, while being lucid and not exaggeratedly foregrounding the epistemological self-reflexivity. She highlights, as does Chakravarti, that Subbalakshmi's diary was written only during 1924-27, a very small portion of her life, and those entries, with their thoroughly non-emotional style, have to be read in their starkness; similarly, with much of her reading, what we have are reading-lists, not written descriptions of Subbalakshmi's responses to the books.

Sivaraman very successfully avoids sentimentalizing her grandmother's life, but nonetheless allows us to see both the richness and the poignancy of it, especially in the two spheres of the life of the mind and politics. Subbalakshmi spun khadi all her life, aspired to be a political activist among indentured Indian labour in South Africa, and contributed money to the Congress. Equally, she was a passionate admirer of Rabindranath Tagore, known to all her family simply as 'Gurudev', and for her Shantiniketan was a never-visited utopia. She loved art, and was a particularly keen admirer of the Bengal School of painting, especially its towering maestro, Nandalal Bose. She subscribed for years to the *Visva-Bharati Quarterly*, and suggested mischievously to her daughter, when she had taken her to an art exhibition in Madras, that she should marry the handsome Bengal School painter Asit Haldar, just as, years later she suggested to Mythili that her grand-



daughter should marry a Muslim!

Threaded through the whole narrative is a complex, painful account of a difficult marriage. Subbalakshmi's husband, PRG, as he was almost universally referred to, emerges as a man remarkable in his own way, but so very different from Subbalakshmi that the incompatibility is heartbtreakingly evident; equally, Sivaraman does not mince her analysis in her account of PRG the patriarch and PRG the obscurantist. This is so despite the fact that, as she candidly states, in her childhood, it was PRG who seemed her 'knight-in-armour' and a very fond grandfather, while Subbalakshmi, characteristically, was reticent and aloof, even though she told her grandchildren stories. While PRG was a devout practising Hindu, fascinated by swamis and godmen of all hues to whom he extended lavish hospitality, Subbalakshmi's spirituality manifested itself in the modest idol of Krishna in her room with which children played as if it was a toy. Subbalakshmi found Buddhism engrossing, and read both primary and secondary literature on it.

Sivaraman has wonderful sections on the close relationship that Subbalakshmi and her friend Grace Samuel had with nature. The story of that friendship is also told, and the unusual circumstances in which it was formed, when Subbalakshmi had to be hospitalized for two months in 1916 for a distended uterus: her husband did not visit her even once, and she had to discharge herself. Crossing the boundaries of religion, Grace and Subbalakshmi bonded, sharing, among other things, a great love of reading. Grace was also an absorbed observer of nature, and Subbalakshmi seems to have learnt much from her friend in this respect: when PRG's postings as government civil servant would take them to remote hamlets on the Coromandel coast, Subbalakshmi spent hours engrossed in observing the minutiae of the natural world. In a chapter with the wonderful title 'Some of her Favourite Things', we get snippets from Subbalakshmi's diary of descriptions of 'strangely lovely nights', of moonlight, of clouds, but we also learn that she was a keen birdwatcher—one of her nephews remembered often finding her crouching under some bush, trying to look closely at a bird she had spied there. In Pankajam's 'Memoirs', there is a superb description of a pond which PRG thought of as a dirty malarial pool, but which mother and daughter found full of beautiful flora and fauna, from frog eggs and tadpoles to water scorpions, water spiders, dragon flies, and fish. One cannot help speculating that with proper access to training, two very skilled women natural scientists might have emerged.

Equally, during the years that Subbalakshmi spent in Madras, she became good friends with Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay. Subbalakshmi subscribed to the Chattopadhyays' art journal *Shamma*, and generally took to this avant-garde, culturally and politically progressive set with gusto. Urban cultural spaces such as art exhibitions charmed her. Country and city, nature and culture, science and art—Subbalakshmi bridged and found congenial each half of such apparent polarities.

Given the vivid, sharply etched sense that any reader gets of the quiddity, intellectual spark, and political commitment of Subbalakshmi, there is no getting away from the fact that her life dwindled into deep unhappiness, into the pain and clouding of mental illness. Systemic, structural obstacles from patriarchy, in particular emanating from her marriage and husband, contributed majorly to silencing her. But, though it may be no consolation for Subbalakshmi's thwarted aspirations, she will live for many years and for many people through this fine book. Perhaps this is the fittest tribute to Subbalakshmi, that discerning and intellectually demanding 'common reader'.■

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Portraying A Vanishing Community

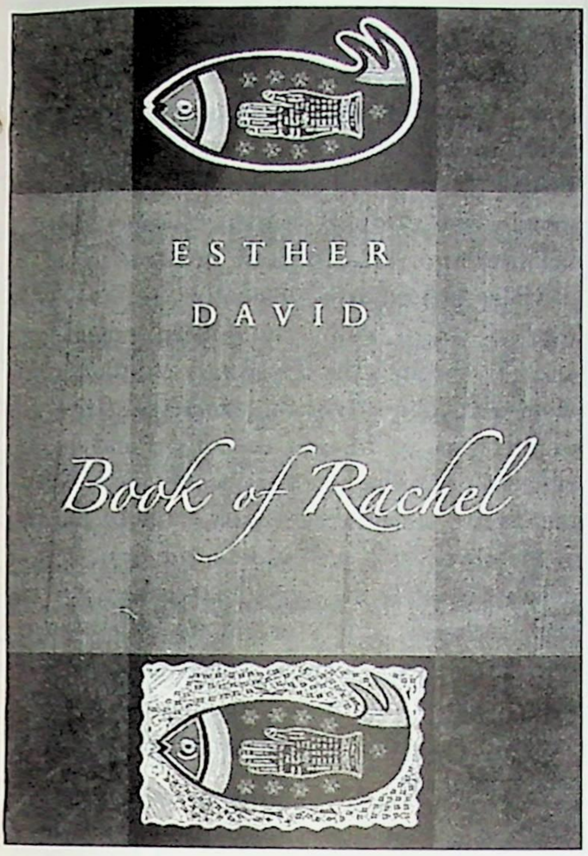
Deeptha Achar

BOOK OF RACHEL
By Esther David
Penguin/Viking, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 197, Rs. 295.00

In many ways, Esther David's *Book of Rachel* resonates with rather than follows from the preoccupations in her earlier books. As in her previous book *Book of Esther*, whose very title suggests a certain proximity to this new one, and also her former novel *The Walled City*, David is concerned with depicting Jewish life in a contemporary Indian context. However, *Book of Rachel* marks a turn in her exploration of this theme. Her preceding books look inward at the Bene Israel Jews in India, chronicling the community yet critiquing it through the travails and triumphs of her protagonists.

In that sense, *Book of Rachel* is more ambitious. It not only portrays the community from within but also examines the pushes and pulls, economic and cultural, which impinge upon it. Moving from the Ahmedabad setting of *Book of Esther* to coastal Maharashtra, the novel tells the tale of a vanishing community. The story is simple enough: Rachel Dandekar lives alone in her family home in Danda near Alibaug. Her two sons and daughter have immigrated to Israel and she herself is the only Jew left in the place. Memories of her life with her husband Aaron and her ritual cleaning of the abandoned synagogue structure her present life. More than the few scraps of Hebrew prayer that she remembers, her touch with her religion is through her systematic observation of custom especially in the preparation of Jewish food. Her world begins to fall apart when the synagogue and its land catch the eye of property developers who are hand in glove with some of the synagogue trustees. Fired with a new purpose, she hunts out a Jewish lawyer Judah to see if there is some way to save the synagogue. The rest of the novel comprises the way that this is managed and all ends well. Judah, with his professed atheism and resentment towards the Indian Jewish community, gradually gets gathered back into the Jewish fold in the wake of Rachel's transformative energy, not to mention her wonderful cooking. Along the way, her daughter Zephra, who comes back to help Rachel in the fight, and Judah fall in love, but clearly the love interest in the novel is minor. More carefully portrayed are vignettes of Jewish life and custom as seen through Rachel's eyes.

Formally, *Book of Rachel* is more experimental than *Book of Esther*. Particularly striking are the carefully researched recipes that inaugurate



every chapter. Interrupting the narrative, these recipes are accompanied by notes that tie them to a Jewish festival, belief or event while at the same time weaving them into the events in the novel. Plotted into the relatively linear narration, this device adds texture to the manner in which different facets of the community are brought into play. Though marking difference from the others in the village, the recipes with their striking propinquity to Konkan cuisine, also simultaneously gesture to the manner in which the community had assimilated to the cultural life of coastal Maharashtra. Their very names—'Indian Matzo or bin-khameer-chi-bhakhri', 'Tilkut Potatoes', 'Miri cha Maas'—suggest that the life and living of Jews on the coast was hardly very different from their Marathi neighbours. Rachel's nine-yard saris, her familiarity with Marathi bhajans, her friendship with her neighbours are emphasized again and again: " But the people of the village had been caring and affectionate. They appreciated the fact that, although she was a Bene Israel Teli, she spoke Marathi with the right intonation, just like them, and also knew all the Maharashtrian customs, so much so that often they introduced her to their relatives as a Konkanasth Brahmin" (p.5) Indeed, through the novel it almost appears that but for a few quaint customs, the Shanivar Teli Jews of Danda are hardly "a minority community" (p.5). This subtext certainly complicates the idea that the Bene Israel are a group with a distinctive minoritarian identity.

The manner in which the recipes are deployed in the novel recall Allan Sealy's *Trotternama*, which is, again, a novel about the small and distinctive Anglo-Indian community. The *Book of Rachel* does not have the epic proportions or the formal inventiveness of *Trotternama.* Still, the value attached to old recipes in both these novels points to the cultural importance of food in the imagination of community. What makes the recipes in *Book of Rachel* even more significant is the role that the cooking of food plays in women's lives, the way that recipes structure women's time and shape women's imagination. Chik Cha Halwa, which is the Jewish New Year Halwa, takes something like three days to make.

The twin focuses on the economic and cultural landscape that structures minoritarian life and the depiction of an ageing woman's years is carefully accomplished. Yet, the intricate structure of the novel is not supported by an equal complexity of language. The language, which stays largely with simple linguistic constructions and short sentences, ends up flattening the narrative and leaching the characters of colour. Illustrations, also by David, accompany the title of every chapter. As a device, they have the potential to enrich the narrative. But this does not happen at least partly because the drawings are too literal and offer no significant amplification of the text. The character of Rachel, on whom the novel rests, shows flashes of real strength but the others who people the novel are not rendered with the same care. Nor are the sub-plots sufficiently worked out. Quite clearly, David has tried to capture the nuances of Marathi in the rhythm of Rachel's speech and thought; though she is successful at times, the dialogue is occasionally stilted and awkward. But perhaps more than other things, the conflict free relationship side by side with the easy homogeneity of language and even caste between Rachel and her Marathi neighbours runs against the grain of an assertive self identity that the novel proposes for Indian Jews.

Nevertheless, *Book of Rachel* is a noteworthy addition to the growing corpus of fiction about small minority communities in India. Along with the fiction of Rohinton Mistry and Allan Sealy, David's growing body of work on the dwindling Bene Israel community point to little known areas of cultural life in India without nostalgia, without bitterness.■

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Chasms and Relationships

Ranjana Kaul

THE SPACE BETWEEN US
By Thrity Umrigar
Harper Collins India, 2006, pp. 321, Rs. 350.00

Thrity Umrigar's second novel , *The Space Between Us* is, to put it very simplistically, the story of Sera Dubash, a middle class westernized Parsi, and Bhima, her maid. In this novel Umrigar moves beyond the world of middle-class Parsis which she portrayed so well in *Bombay Time*, and depicts the wide spectrum of class and society which constitutes the fabric of life in a modern Indian metropolis. Bhima is a representative of that extensive support system of workers without whom most Indian middle class households would collapse; individuals who touch upon the lives of their privileged employers intimately but themselves remain peripheral and insignificant entities in any deeper and meaningful sense in those lives. Her relationship with Sera, based on the struggle for survival on the one hand and necessity on the other, illustrates those subtle nuances of separation and distance from the lower classes which most middle class Indians accept without thought. Sera's affection and concern for Bhima are undeniable and yet, regardless of the fact that Bhima has been a sympathetic presence through most of the significant crises of Sera's married life, her ingrained biases prevent Sera from allowing Bhima to use the same utensils or furniture as the family.

The novel depicts the wide chasm of class and conditioning which separates the lives of the two women without any facile sentimentality, but it also reveals the unspoken but deep intimacy that binds them in a strange relationship based on mutual dependence and support. Despite their different backgrounds and circumstances, Bhima and Sera are similar in their dignity and ability to accept life on its terms without succumbing to its cruelties and injustices .The gentle and refined Sera hides the humiliation of her husband Firoze's beatings from the world and from her daughter Dinaz, perhaps the only unflawed character in the novel. One of the most evocative passages in the novel describes Sera's recognition that Firoz is never going to be the companion with whom she once visualized sharing her deepest emotions. She realizes she can never tell him "how certain notes of the Moonlight Sonata shredded her heart like wind inside a paper bag; how her soul felt as endless and deep as the sea churning on their left; how the sight of the young

Muslim couple filled her with an emotion that was equal parts joy and sadness; and above all how she wanted a marriage that was different from the dead sea of marriages she saw all around her…"

Bhima , whose story begins and ends the novel, also gradually becomes disenchanted as the romantic young man she married changes, by force of circumstance, into a brooding cynical individual. She struggles stoically with a series of financial and emotional problems, learning to roll with the punches life throws at her. Reflecting on Bhima's relationship with Gopal Sera realizes that, " They were alike in many ways, Bhima and she. Despite the different trajectories of their lives —circumstances, she now thinks, dictated by the accident of their births—they had both known the pain of watching the bloom fade from their marriages."

From the beginning it is evident that the past is an inescapable part of the lives of both the women, constantly impinging on their emotions and responses in the present. Bhima's dreams of educating her granddaughter Maya are inspired by her promise to her daughter Pooja and her recognition that own illiteracy was the cause of a pivotal crisis in her life with her husband Gopal. Sera too, frequently remembers the pain of Firoze's blows though it is many years since she suffered them. At times she feels as though "the pain of memory is encoded into our bone marrow….the body is this hypersensitive, revengeful entity, a ledger book, a warehouse of remembered slights and cruelties." But the memory also records acts of kindness and compassion and it is the very ambivalence of such recognitions, which make the characters and relationships in the novel real.

The motif of betrayal runs through the narrative as a connecting thread , linking all the characters. Gopal, Firoze,Viraf, Sera's son-in-law, and even the gentle Freddie papa, are fallible or, in the final analysis, merely human. Freddie Dubash uses his beautiful music as an escape from a domestic tyranny whose "very banality protected it from exposure," but reveals his own selfishness by drawing the unsuspecting Sera into the dysfunctional Dubash family. Gopal abandons Bhima to a life which is precariously dependent upon the goodwill of Serabai but the final betrayal in Bhima's life proves her resilience and the strength of her will to survive.

The Space Between Us is a beautifully crafted novel about betrayals and loyalties, about courage and cowardice and also ultimately about defeat and victory. It captures the imagination through its meticulously observed delineation of that intricate interweaving of privilege and poverty which remains an integral part of life in any modern Indian city and also through the apparently effortless and almost lyrical quality of its language. The proliferation of images, metaphors and similes enlivens the prose and enriches the depiction of the diverse social fabric which is the backdrop of the novel. However, quite apart from the delights of style the novel transcends the cliché'd format of the servant-master relationship through its nuanced portrayal of individuals, relationships and the unpredictable variety and complexity of human emotions and relationships.■

Ranjana Kaul teaches English Literature in the College of Vocational Studies, Delhi University, and has worked on the impact of marginality on literary representations of women from minority communities.

Interesting People, Uninteresting Thoughts

Parsa Venkateshwar Rao Jr.

TOMORROW'S INDIA: ANOTHER TRYST WITH DESTINY
Edited by B.G.Verghese
Penguin/Viking, Delhi, 2006, pp.349, Rs.595.00

The one thing that strikes the reader as he closes the book is: Interesting people, uninteresting thoughts. The section, "About the Authors" makes for more interesting reading than the book itself. This is a puzzling thing, apart from being an obvious paradox. And it needs some explanation. The Stephanians who have contributed to this 125th St. Stephens College anniversary issue are successful bureaucrats, diplomats, journalists, politicians, academics. They are examples of men and women of the world of whom the college can justifiably be proud. But it does not follow that they have anything profound or original or meaningful to say about the condition of India or about its future. The underlying assumption of the book is precisely that: That Stephanians who have been successful in various walks of life, and who have occupied influential positions in the pecking order have something to say about the country. These are the people who have handled the affairs of the country at different vantage points. So, they have a better perspective on things. And as they are successful people of the world, they are also intelligent enough to think, to analyse issues and to prescribe solutions. These are troublesome assumptions, and they become more so when the analyses and prescriptions in this book turn out to be so lackadaisical. This does not in any way mean the honourable men and women who have stood up to air their view are any less intelligent, or any less successful for that.

Let us look at the some of the contributions. Three of them are from politicians – Natwar Singh, Mani Shankar Aiyar, Kapil Sibal. And they have written unispiring ministerial memos. Singh has outlined India's foreign policy. Aiyar has dwelt on his favourite subject of panchayat raj. And Sibal has turned in something about the Department of Science and Technology. Aiyar somehow connects his argument with his study of economics at St.Stephen's, which is an interesting aside. But there is nothing to glean from these three pieces.

Then we have three curious pieces from Bunker Roy, Dilip Simeon and Mukul Kesavan. They belong to a generation that follows Singh-Sibal-Aiyar. Roy, who is known for his contributions to the NGO sector has this confessions to make: "The Doon School and St.Stephen's College do not expose you or condition you to work in villages, in Bharat…The environment is protected, unreal, artificial and elitist and completely cut off from the grim realities of Bharat…The best of education in India is by far the worst of education for Bharat." It is, of course, not a representative view of what St.Stephen's has to offer. If that were so, this book would not have happened. But Roy's self-deprecation, though very sincere, is really an adolescent's lament. India was always a complex country, and each generation seems to be rediscovering it time and again, starting with Jawaharlal Nehru's discovery of India.

Simeon, who finds himself caught between "reformist illusion" and revolutionary delusion" is surprised that an elitist St. Stpehen's produced "a phalanx of left-wing students". And then he goes on to delineate his tale of disenchantment. It is an interesting personal narrative, whose value is not to be discounted because of more authentic stories from elsewhere. Simeon's truthfulness is not sufficient to tell us much about the country. This point needs to be made because this book is about what Stephanians have to say about the country.

Then we have Kesavan's acute social confession: "In the mid-1970s undergraduates in St. Stephen's College spent their three years in college not watching Hindi films. Which is not to say people did not watch Hindi movies – they must have done. It's simply to point out that sloping off to see a movie starring Rajesh Khanna was not

The underlying assumption of the book is ... That Stephanians who have been successful in various walks of life, and who have occupied influential positions in the pecking order have something to say about the country. These are the people who have handled the affairs of the country at different vantage points.

an important part of your social or intellectual life." Another searing revelation in the manner of Roy and Simeon.

All the three have overcome the disadvantages of elitism of the alma mater to become better citizens and intellectuals in their respective spheres. The analyses and prescriptions they have to offer derive from their deprived situation as students of a privileged institution. There is a lot of existential angst in all these soulful stories which is of interest to the reader, but what they have to say for the country is nothing more than a curiosity.

Then we come to those who have no sense of irony or self-doubt which any respecting intellectual should entertain. Bureaucrat N.K.Singh goes into a pseudo-magisterial analysis of the issues of development and growth in the eastern states of West Bengal, Orissa and Bihar. And he comes to the platitudinous conclusion that Bihar and Orissa can do better if they improve their governance, and he thinks that West Bengal has joined the national mainstream of a market-led national economy. Another doubt-free disquisition in dyed-in-the-wool classical Marxism comes from Communist Party of India (Marxist) politburo member Sitaram Yechury, who reveals the old theses with much clarity and reiterates his belief in Marxism. The country wobbles on as the ideological hooting of different kinds fill the sky as it were.

Economist and former Vice-Chancellor of Delhi University Deepak Nayyar is one person who tries to grapple with the question of the future instead of speaking from a self-created pulpit. He states the issues most lucidly, acknowledges divergences and dichotomies between India and Bharat, and gives out a gentle warning: "It is not just that there are two sharply contrasting views of India in the world. There are two different, almost dichotomized, worlds in India. There is an India that is global and there is a Bharat that is local. What is more, there is a virtual disconnect between these two worlds. Of course, India is a society in which different cultures (traditional and modern), different divides (caste, class and religion), or even different centuries (nineteenth and twenty-first) co-exist. There is no clash between modernity and tradition. At the same time the diversity and pluralism are necessary as also desirable. But the dichotomy between India and Bharat is not." But this is an un-Stephanian themesong. There is neither presumptious self-confidence nor corroding self-doubt. It is the voice of a social scientist.

The other piece which gives a glimpse of a deep insight is that of B.G.Verghese, where he quietly touches on the burning issue that is tearing India apart – the battle between religious and secular fundamentalists – and takes us to an aspect of the Indian Constitution, which intellectuals of all hues, tend to dismiss without much ado. Verghese points out: "The Constitution that 'We, the People' gave unto ourselves at the founding of the Republic was postulated on the principles of Liberty, Equality, Social (?) Justice and Fraternity for all citizens. This promise subsumes equal respect for all faiths (sarva dharma samabahava) in what is a deeply religious society. Citizenship, not faith, was the major premise. Fraternity was to provide the binding. But somewhere along the line, quite early on, the relationship was reversed. Secualrism became the major premise and Fraternity somehow faded away. 'Secular' means worldly as opposed to sacred or religious and the term found a place in the Constitution only in that sense in Article 25. It was, however, introduced into the Preamble during the Emergency in 1976, not replacing but certainly relegating the centrality of Fraternity."

Then he goes on to tackle the more thorny issue of majority and minority with quiet frankness: "Political discourse still turns around the concept of (religious) minorities and majority in a numerical sense. From this it is only a step towards viewing them as electoral categories or vote banks....More truly, the terms minority and majority represent attitudes. An assured and confident community does not feel called upon to proclaim itself a minority. Witness the Parsis. In contrast, the Sinhala majority in Sri Lanka has in recent years exhibited the behavioural reflexes of a minority in relation to the Tamil problem. Likewise, Hindutva protagonists suffer from a similar minority syndrome which is often manifest in the vocabulary they use. If language begets attitudes, should the usage be changed?"

But Nayyar and Verghese are the exceptions to this anthology. The majority of the contributors to this volume flounder in their own certainties, and they have nothing perceptive to say abut the challenges facing the country. Every college has a right to have its internal dialogue and celebration. As such, this 125th anniversary volume of St. Stephens' alumni is unexceptionable. But the Stephanians have much less claim to speak about the country than about themselves.■

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Nudging the Urge for Knowledge

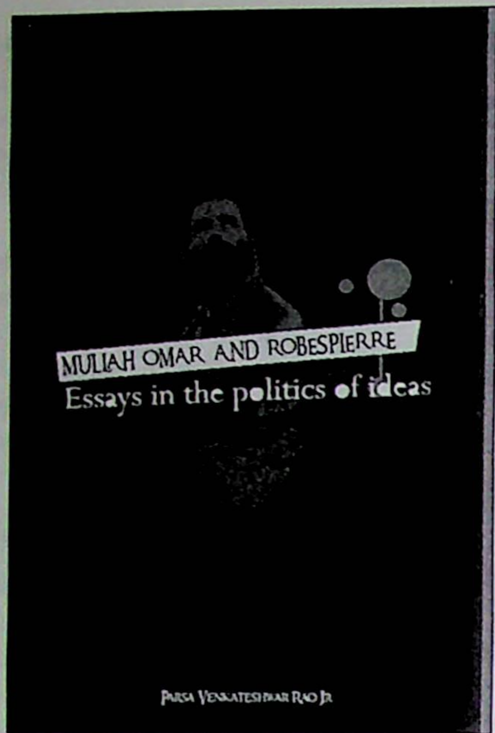
Harsh Sethi

MULLAH OMAR AND ROBESPIERRE: ESSAYS IN THE POLITICS OF IDEAS
By Parsa Venkateshwar Rao Jr.
Rupa & Co., Delhi, 2005. pp. 162, Rs. 395.00

Despite its phenomenal growth and diversification in the last decade, Indian media, both print and television, remains an inadequate and flawed vehicle for the communication of serious ideas. Most analysts disparagingly refer to the dumbing down of the media, the unhealthy growth of a page 3 culture, an obsession with titilatory gossip and the ever-present three Fs – films, fashion and food. Marketing whiz-kids seem convinced that packaging is all, that serious content puts off potential readers and viewers. Why, Pritish Nandy, the *enfant terrible* of Indian media, in the days he was editing *the Sunday Observor* (since closed down), even scrapped the editorial page, claiming that it was the least-read section of the paper. Distressingly for the high-minded, few noticed and even fewer objected.

Take, however, the contra trend. Sham Lal, without doubt the most erudite editor that the English language Indian media has produced, for decades wrote a column exclusively devoted to books and ideas as the lead edit article. That, for anyone browsing through *The Times of India*, today appears pre-history. Less remarked on is the fact that ever since the late seventies, leading intellectuals have been contributing regularly to most newspapers, oftentimes to the detriment of their other work. And the contributions of scholars, from an Andre Betteille (occasional) to a Pratap Bhanu Mehta (prolific) are avidly followed and discussed. Present-day journalists too are far more qualified than they were in the past. The negative assessment of our media nevertheless persists.

So what is one to make of Parsa Venkateshwar Rao Jr.'s grouse that 'going by the high decibel level and low quality of public debates in India, it is evident that there is a short supply of ideas.' Is the problem with our intellectual class, that they 'have shown themselves to be averse to either generating new ideas or reaching out to ideas out there and informing the people about them'? Or is it that contributing to informed debate through a serious engagement with the core presuppositions informing political and policy choices does not fit into the preconceived package of media as a saleable product? Being polite or modest, he sidesteps the uneasy feeling shared by most editors that far too many of our 'intellectuals', within and



without the media, churn out unreadable copy – one reason why the 'ideas' they seek to promote fail to generate reader enthusiasm. Of course, there are exceptions.

Parsa's effort at persisting with a fortnightly column on books, authors and ideas, be it in the *New Sunday Express* or on tehelka.com is thus both unusual and commendable. And if his labours succeeded in winning a loyal, though small, readership, it is both a tribute to his writing skill as also the fact that the marketing whiz-kids of media have erred in their assessment of what the market desires. The 38 short essays in the book, mostly written during 2001-02, make for an intriguing and engaged reading, both individually and collectively. They challenge the lazy certitudes of our intelligentsia, their unwillingness to unpack meta concepts such as modernism, secularism, nationalism (viewed uncritically as positive) or communism and religious fundamentalism (seen as negative). Equally, more than pronouncing a firm position on these concepts, Parsa attempts to go beyond the conventional and polarized either-or divide to foreground the ambiguities and ambivalences embedded in these modern shibboleths. His invitation to us as readers is to eschew easy agreement or disagreement and think for ourselves.

Take the early essays on the Taliban and religious fundamentalism. To compare Robespierre, a declared atheist and Republican and Mullah Omar, a votary of one version of orthodox Islam, may appear heretical. One is viewed as a throwback to medieval Islamism; the other as an unrepentant though flawed advocate of secular modernity. And yet, both were fanatics, willing to use terror as a way to 'impose order and piety on society'. We are reminded that the untrammelled desire to do good often does incalculable harm. Today, we may be ruing the fallouts of Imam Khomeni's 'revolution'. We should also remember that the excesses of a Stalin, a Mao or a Pol Pot had enthusiastic defenders in some of our leading academics. Many of the leading lights of the Khmer Rouge were for instance trained at the Sorbonne.

Each of the short essays in the first section – Baudrillard on 9/11, Karen Armstrong on religious fundamentalism, Bakunin on Marx, Gramsci on Machiavelli, among others – are attempts at smuggling in dissenting and contrarian views, ideas that go against the grain – all with a purpose to nudge us to revisit our presuppositions. This is a quality that marks most of the essays in the book. In a sense, they also reveal what Parsa seems more comfortable with – a somewhat low-key and ironic tone that slowly grows on you. No surprise that of all the Indian historians, his greatest admiration is for S. Gopal (pp. 81-84) – 'The words are carefully chosen. The tone is neutral. Gopal shows his mastery of historical narrative through a deceptively simple approach.'

Equally of interest is Parsa's ability to recover forgotten nuggets – Gandhi's debate with Martin Buber on the making of Israel, Plato's foregrounding of the need for politics to have a soul, even more that 'we should consider it a lesser evil to suffer great wrong and outrages than to do them' – a lesson that our self-righteous and politically correct might do well to heed. And for those of us who admire Arundhati Roy's passionate polemic against 'development and progress' might gain from the short but prescient essay on Ivan Illich, the forgotten hero.

Be it Popper or Thoreau, Kant or Al Ghazali, Sri Aurobindo or Maulana Azad – each of these ruminations serve to trigger a process of reflection. And while the writing is not uniformly appealing, even at times clumsy, it is invariably unsettling. If such was Parsa Venkateshwar Rao's intention, he has succeeded.

Harsh Sethi is with *Seminar*.

Book News

Art and Architecture

Glimpses of Architecture in Kerala: Temples and Places by Ramu Katakam with photographs by Joginder Singh explores through visual commentary the extraordinary timber buildings of Kerala in India.
Rupa & Co., New Delhi, 2006, pp. 232, price not stated.

Forts & Palaces of India: Sentinels of History by Bindu Manchanda spans the four corners of India, and features the forts and palaces and brings under perview their historical and cultural significance as well as their architectural splendour and beauty.
Lustre Press / Roli Books, 2006, pp. 192, price not stated.

Alternate Lyricism by Jehangir Jani edited by Ratnottama Sengupta has an introduction by Shivaji K. Panikkar and has essays by Hoskote, Mehta, Chatterjee, Adajania, Sahana and Achar and features Jani in conversation with Ratnottama Sengupta.
Mapin Publishing, Ahmedabad, 2006, pp. 120, price not stated.

Gitanjali: Offerings of Songs and Art by Rabindranath Tagore with paintings by Mark W. Mcginnis is inspired by the artists' understanding of the creative mind behind them.
Maping Publishing, Ahmedabad, 2005, Rs. 750.00

Francis Newton Souza: Bridging Western and Indian Modern Art by Aziz Kurtha is an expose on the artist who was largely responsible for shaping the Modern Art Movement in India.
Mapin Publishing, Ahmedabad, 2006, pp. 212, Rs. 3500.00

Fiction

Londonstani by Gautam Malkani's debut work describes a London of young Asians and white boys trying to work out a place for themselves in the shadow of the divergent cultures of their parents' generation.
Fourth Estate, Great Britain, 2006, pp. 342, £12.99

Literature

Erotic Literature of Ancient India: Kamasutra Koka Shastra, Gita Govindam, Ananga Ranga by Sandhya Mulchandani explores the spiritual texts and the hidden dimensions of the unity between the human and the divine.
Lustre Press / Roli Books, Delhi, 2006, pp. 190, price not stated.

Media Studies

Courts Legislatures Media Freedom edited by K.N. Harikumar explores the different facets of the relationship of the judiciary, the political establishment, the mass media and the public.
National Book Trust, India, 2006, pp. 190, Rs. 200.00

Nildarpan, would the British authorities have clamped censorship in 1876? Dozens of non-escapist commercial Bengali scripts served as models of Indian modernism, advocating everything from women's equality to nationalistic protest. As for realism in the twentieth century, which Karnad thinks alienated Indians owing to its imported dependence on the drawing room, let me remind him that the Indian People's Theatre Association's *Nabanna* (1944) utilized stark realism in a rural setting, inspiring audiences and artists everywhere. Regarding Sanskrit, why, every regional dramatic tradition commenced in the nineteenth century with a renaissance and rediscovery of the classics, adapted and imitated by early modern playwrights in every language.

Dharwadker takes up where Karnad leaves off. She writes, "the members of Karnad's theatrical generation ... approach playwriting as a serious literary activity and drama as a complex verbal art". Excuse me, does Tagore fail this test? And so many other early pathfinders all over the country? She labels Karnad and Co. "the first group of modern playwrights in India who belong simultaneously to the economies of print and performance." Does she not know that the bestselling Parsi dramatists sold lakhs of copies of their scripts? That Amanat's *Indarsabha* (1853) had fifty editions in various languages? Leave alone Tagore's corpus, again? Or do these authors belong to the ancient/medieval period? She continues, "By advancing theoretical and polemical arguments about form, language, style, purpose, and influence ... they have offered the first fully developed, often antithetical theories of dramatic representation and reception in the modern period in India". Has she not read Tagore's attacks on European theatre and his manifesto for an Indian theatre? She may call Karnad contemporary, postcolonial, postmodern, whatever she wants, but not modern.

Dharwadker repeats the much-circulated myth that *Hayavadana* "was the first work to translate into notable practice the debate over the usefulness of indigenous performance genres in the development of a new, quintessentially 'Indian' theatre." This is just not true. The first such production came two decades previously, in Gujarati – Rasiklal Parikh's *Mena Gurjari* (1953) directed by the famous female impersonator Jaishankar Sundari – which trail-blazed the folk-based city theatre (if we overlook pre-1947 experiments) by mixing ingredients of Bhavai with great success. Sadly, this acclaimed play dropped out of national theatre discourse because nobody translated it, whereas *Hayavadana* was.

The business of translation raises another misconception that Dharwadker perpetuates: "in Indian theatre the prompt recognition of new plays as contemporary classics does not depend so much on publication or performance in the original language of composition as on the rapidity with which the plays are performed and (secondarily) published in other languages." I am cynical about this seemingly democratic process. Only a handful of authors in a handful of languages (Hindi, Bengali, Marathi, Kannada) get translated in a relatively closed circuit that privileges them over all others. Very few Indians translate drama, and they have their personal likes; these translators have engineered the travel of scripts across India by default. They translate randomly, not systematically. So, a limited number of dramatists and plays gain national exposure.

Meanwhile, because our directors do not rely on the western practice of dramaturges who could advise them literarily, they choose from among the few contemporary scripts translated into their language. Thus, some playwrights gain in number of nationwide productions at the expense of many deserving others. They are perhaps excellent, like Karnad, but so are others who never become pan-Indian simply because chance dictates that they were not selected by the small coterie of translators. *Mena Gurjari* is a drama in point. Another example is Utpal Dutt, most of whose masterpieces remain unknown. That the plays are untranslated does not necessarily make them inferior. Quantity of Indian productions alone may prove nothing other than a degree of translatorial or directorial popularity, if not fashion. It does not automatically confer "classic" status.

Finally, some essentials missing from Dharwadker's stage history of Karnad. As noted above, she does not mention Bohurupee's Bengali avatar of *Yayati* (directed by Kumar Roy, 1988). Most surprisingly, she omits Sanket's mind-blowing Kannada *Naga-Mandala* (directed by Shankar Nag, 1989), the finest interpretation of any Karnad that I have seen. And, notwithstanding Karnad's rare repudiation of the National School of Drama's *Agni aur Barkha*, I found it quite compelling (though I am no particular fan of its director, Prasanna) at least in its first half, certainly more than the wordy and watery *Agnijal* (1995) directed by Bhaskar Chandavarkar, who considers it Karnad's best work.

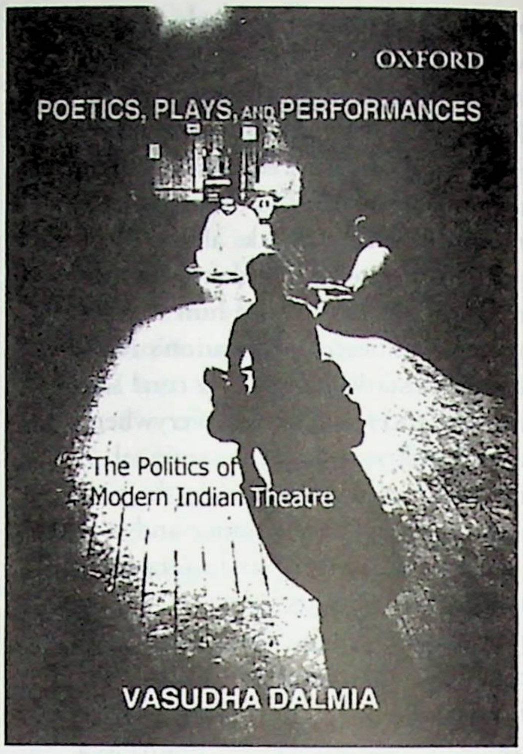
Ironically, the cultural amnesia that Karnad accuses the nineteenth-century elite of actually backfires on him and Dharwadker. In fact, 150 years ago, the Indian intelligentsia knew their artistic background comparatively well; unfortunately, since Independence, our theatre people have developed such sublime self-importance and wilful ignorance that they deny everything that went immediately before. How much more satisfying it would be if they accepted their precursors' pioneering actions and reviewed themselves as taking Indian theatre further in this continuum of time, creating fresh new art suited for the peculiarities of their own age. That is what all true artists do.■

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Hindi = Delhi = India?

Sudhanva Deshpande

POETICS, PLAYS AND PERFORMANCES: THE POLITICS OF MODERN INDIAN THEATRE
By Vasudha Dalmia
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006, pp. xiv+366, Rs. 675.00



There are two problems with 'Indian theatre'. One is that it is theatre. The other is that it is Indian. This has curious implications for the scholar.

Of all the arts, theatre has resisted mechanical – and now digital – reproduction the most. In this, it is not only the very opposite of cinema, the quintessential mass art of the industrial age, but even the plastic arts and music have adapted to the industrial age rather well. Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code* is a runaway bestseller, even though only a tiny fraction of its readers would have seen Leonardo's works in the original, because the mass reproduction of the paintings makes it possible for us to follow the clues in the novel.

Theatre has resisted this tendency. Maybe this has to do with the rise of cinema. As a result, more people are likely to have seen, say, Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* or Vishal Bhardwaj's *Maqbool* than to have seen *Macbeth* staged in a theatre. Over the past three or four years, some stage performances have been shot on video in Maharashtra, but this is still limited to Marathi. And, to date, despite the boom, while television broadcasts all kinds of things –cookery classes, spiritual mumbo jumbo, page three parties, fashion shows, religious festivals, etc. – I am yet to hear of a theatrical performance being broadcast. Naseeruddin Shah, in other words, is no competition to Baba Ramdev.

Plays are, of course, published. But certain plays and playwrights get published sooner than others. For instance, while most of Girish Karnad's or Vijay Tendulkar's best-known plays are available in the original and in several translations, many of Habib Tanvir's plays were first published in Hindi only in 2004, the year he turned 81, and most are not even available in English, not to mention Kannada or Marathi or Bengali. The other problem is that a published play gets read – and often taught – as a piece of literature, not as a performance text. Thus, for instance, students of English literature in Delhi University are expected to read Mohan Rakesh or Tendulkar, without having the foggiest notion of the performance histories of the plays.

The 'Indianness' of Indian theatre poses its own problems. Straightaway, because it is Indian, it is not singular, but plural. There are many theatres in India, in several languages, in big cities and smaller towns and villages, in commercial and amateur settings, in varying relations to western proscenium and Indian rural theatre, and so on. A commercial film, whether produced in Bombay or Madras or Calcutta is, in essence, the same product. Watch, on the other hand, K.N. Panikkar's production of *Karnabharam* and then Chandradasan's. You'd be hard-pressed to believe they both come from the same city, so completely different is their treatment of the play. And then there are the more conceptual problems: what is 'Indian'? Does 'Indian' necessarily have to hark back to the Sanskrit or 'folk' tradition? What, indeed, is the 'folk' tradition? Can urban proscenium theatre, based on the western model, be considered authentic 'Indian' theatre?

Vasudha Dalmia's book deals with many of these problems. It is divided into three sections. The first interrogates the search for a 'national' theatre. This, Dalmia does by considering the careers and writings (both dramatic and theoretical) of three preeminent Hindi writers: Bharatendu Harishchandra of Banaras, widely considered the progenitor of Hindi drama, Jayshankar Prasad, also of Banaras, born in 1886, the year after Bharatendu's death, and Mohan Rakesh. The progression, she argues, is from reflection on the history and aesthetics of a new drama appropriate for a new age (Bharatendu), to a reworking of the aesthetics of classical Sanskrit drama in a search for a modernist idiom (Prasad), to a break with the past (in Rakesh) in an attempt to come to terms with the fragmented 'self' and the politics of the home. This is material the author has mastery over, and these three chapters are the best in the book, though why the author jumps from Prasad to Rakesh, without discussing Dharamveer Bharati and his pioneering *Andha Yug*, is not entirely clear. She does refer to Bharati and *Andha Yug*, but later, in discussing 'folk' theatre – and here, she takes at face value Bharati's 'claim of affiliation' of the play to 'folk theatre'. It would have been interesting to hear Dalmia on why Bharati felt compelled to make this farfetched claim, given that Dalmia's book discusses at length the relationship of the traditional and the modern in the shaping of an 'authentic' Indian theatre.

The second section is a consideration of 'folk' theatre in India, mediated in some measure by an engagement with Brecht. Dalmia argues that the urban use of 'folk' theatre went through four stages: distancing from the 'folk', in the theatre of Bharatendu and his contemporaries (though she also points out how in actual practice, Bharatendu uses many elements of 'folk' theatre); attempt to infuse 'folk' forms with contemporary political content, in the work of the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA); the 'rediscovery' of folk, via Brecht, in the urban theatre of the 1960s and '70s; and the appropriation of 'folk' forms by official culture, particularly for the packaging and export of 'Indian culture' abroad. She suggests that the first encounters with Brecht and with 'folk' in the late 1960s and '70s managed to 'reconnect urban to the rural and to the political', whereas 'the end of the 1970s saw the end of creative experimentation' resulting in a 'folk-Brecht mix, which was becoming a formula and proving particularly attractive for young directors trained in the NSD.' One has to ask if the seeds of this were not sown by those who first took to Brecht – it is hard to imagine that directors like Alkazi and Vijaya Mehta were 'seeking a fit between Brecht's socialist vision of the social situation . . . and urban theatre . . .'. Dalmia herself quotes Amal Allana, whose work she admires, as admitting in 1982, after she had directed at least six Brecht productions, that 'my previous work had been contentwise non-committal towards the audience, revealing more a concern with aesthetics.' No wonder Brecht became 'a formula'!

The section ends with a detailed examination of the career and theatre of Habib Tanvir, who began with the IPTA in Bombay in the '40s, travelled to Britain to train in theatre, encountered Brecht's theatre in Germany right after Brecht's death, and then came back to India to fashion his own distinctive brand of

There are two problems with 'Indian theatre'. One is that it is theatre. The other is that it is Indian. This has curious implications for the scholar.

theatre fusing a modernist idiom with rural forms, using rural actors. While this analysis if rich and insightful, one would caution against reading Tanvir's work as a reworking of 'folk', as Dalmia, despite her circumspection, tends to do – for instance, *Charandas Chor* is *not* a 'folk play', as she calls it. It is also useful to recall Tanvir's own insistence that what he was after was not 'folk forms', but rather *rural actors*. They brought with them their forms, which found a way into Naya Theatre plays, but if you talk to the actors themselves, they *invariably* make a distinction between 'nacha' and 'theatre' – the former is what they did in their villages, the latter is what they do with Tanvir.

The last section asks the question, 'What is Indian?' The first chapter of this section joins Rustom Bharucha's critique of 'interculturalism', western theatre practitioners' use of 'Indian' theatre, which leads to a 'flattening' of forms to cater to 'the audiences' universalizing demands' and leads to a 'comfortable reception' of what are supposed to be 'transcultural values'. The last chapter is a review of the dramatization of Tagore's *Gora* under the direction of Anuradha Kapur, a play that problematized the idea of identity, of being Hindu, as the nation was witnessing a heightening of communal tensions in the buildup to the assault on the Babri Masjid.

Dalmia is a leading scholar, and she asks pointed questions. For instance, while she lavishes praise on Bharucha's critique ('brilliant, scintillating, and provocative'), she subjects it to close scrutiny and points out that 'interculturalist inauthenticity cannot be answered back with "authenticity" alone [as Bharucha tends to do], because in doing so the very dichotomization that is to be resisted is validated, even reinstated. . . . Similarly, the "West" cannot be regarded as a monolith.' In critiquing directors like Richard Schechner and Peter Brook, she points out how they tend to 'reduce', 'fragment', 'destroy links', and so on. This becomes a problem because 'centuries of Indian tradition are subsumed within a reading which makes a global claim to representational authenticity.'

It therefore comes as something of a surprise when we find that the 'Indian theatre' in the subtitle of her book is actually only *Hindi* theatre. In her Introduction, Dalmia justifies this move by pointing out that 'Hindi-language theatre does form one central segment of modern theatre in post-Independence India, and thus can be seen as participating formatively in larger theatrical trends' and that 'the concerns articulated in the work of Hindi playwrights themselves . . . merged and meshed with those writing in the other major Indian languages'. This is a moot, if not contentious, point. To what extent can Hindi theatre help us understand, say, Kannada or Marathi or Manipuri theatre? Even if we accept, for argument's sake, that it does, would a study of Kannada or Marathi or Manipuri theatre be accepted as a study of '*Indian*' theatre? For a scholar who is acutely aware of problems of representational claims on the one hand, and the politics of identity on the other, this is a surprising slip. Particularly since, at one place, she castigates Gurusaday Dutt for having 'little hesitation in equating Bengali culture with Indian culture at large'!

Further, even *Hindi* theatre, in this book, actually refers to only *Delhi* theatre. Now, this is a serious problem. If Delhi has been one of the main centres of Hindi theatre, that is basically because, being the capital of the country, it houses the National School of Drama and the various Akademis – the city, as the author admits, has 'no long theatre history'. She defends her decision by arguing that 'the Delhi centred Hindi theatre that I speak of . . . could not but maintain open, porous boundaries' and that 'it could not be the Hindi of the purists'. Well, yes, but that misses the point. On the ground, many theatre persons resent Delhi, its 'official' culture, the NSD, etc., precisely because Delhi does not equal India. This is not merely a polemical point. One does injustice to even Hindi theatre if one does not recognize that equally important to its development have been centres like Bombay, Calcutta, Bhopal and, to a lesser degree, Chandigarh. This leads to a skewed analysis. For instance, a director like Satyadev Dubey, who has had a seminal influence in shaping the field of Indian theatre through his work in both Hindi and Marathi, gets two references in the entire book, and both occur when someone else quotes him, while Ebrahim Alkazi looms large. And while she admires Vivadi's collective work under Anuradha Kapur, it is not clear that she is aware of Chetan Datar's collective efforts in Bombay with trained dancers, resulting in work that is not only formally pathbreaking, but also, as in *Mata Hidimba*, thematically complex, dealing with the politics of identity, caste, gender and environment. This is not to cavil at how many times a specific director is referred to, but to indicate that a Delhi-centric analysis can result in significant blind spots. And it is not as if the author argues that Hindi theatre in other centres is less important – one just gets the feeling that she is not sufficiently familiar with it, or, conversely, is far more familiar with Delhi theatre. This is the difficulty with Indian theatre: since it has resisted mechanical or digital reproduction, it is difficult to analyse theatre one has not been direct witness to.

The task is difficult, but not impossible. Aparna Dharwadker's excellent study, *Theatres of Independence: Drama, Theory and Urban Performance in India Since 1947*, has recently demonstrated this. Dalmia says she speaks of Indian and Hindi theatre in the same breath 'with all due qualifications and reservations'. But why resort to semantic defences? Why not substitute 'Hindi' for 'Indian' in the title?

One last point: this book, like too many others, spends little time discussing theatre as performance, as opposed to drama as text. This becomes especially significant when plays like Tendulkar's *Ghashiram Kotwal* are talked about, because the impact of the original production can be guessed only if you bring into discussion Bhaskar Chandavarkar's superbly political musical score, as well as the performances of actors like Mohan Agashe. One brings this up, because once again Dalmia is aware of this dimension, and does indeed discuss the performance of Manohar Singh in Amal Allana's productions. The towering shadow of Delhi casts darkness elsewhere.■

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Saint Sakharam and the Talkative Cyclist

Prasanna

TWO PLAYS: THE CYCLIST; HIS FIFTH WOMAN
By Vijay Tendulkar
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 80, Rs. 175.00

Vijay Tendulkar is very special to Indian theatre. For one, he is not afraid of being accessible. His language, his themes and his craftsmanship do not scare theatre people away. I like this quality in him. Vijay Tendulkar always knew that it was essential for his plays to survive as popular theatre texts, in order that he emerge as a major Indian playwright. Today Tendulkar's literary merit is well established, even beyond the boundaries of Marathi drama.

Badal Sircar also had these qualities. His early comedies for example were delightful theatre texts. But he became sceptical. He started doubting the need for a gilt edged proscenium frame: the famous lie. He gave up writing fictional plays altogether and took to writing agitational plays. In the process, Badal Sircar became an ascetic, like his mentor Jerzy Grotowski. No. this is not to belittle the achievements of Badal Sircar. Where he lost out as a playwright, he gained enormously in stature, as a theatre person. I think he has influenced more theatre persons in India than most others.

Personally I like the gilt edged theatre though. I also like the lie. A lie is after all the basis on which to build a play. Without it you get stuck in reality; like in Hollywood cinema these days or like the excessively angry political theatre of the seventies.

Is Tendulkar political? Not in the Badal Sircarian sense. Tendulkar is playful. He will not allow anything, including his political commitment to come in the way of his playfulness. Beyond that there is concern. He is troubled by the social reality round him; the meanness and violence. If I have to look for a personality that is the opposite of Tendulkar's, it is Rabindranath Tagore of course.

Tagore believed in his 'egotistical sublime'. He was grand, his themes were grand. He wrote poetic plays, had a long beard, wore even longer robes and rubbed shoulders with world leaders. Tendulkar is so different. He is happy to be in the company of his decadent, drunken, proletariat, book-binder character Sakharam. It is Sakharam, Shukatwe, Ghasiram Sawaldas and the like, who have made Tendulkar famous.

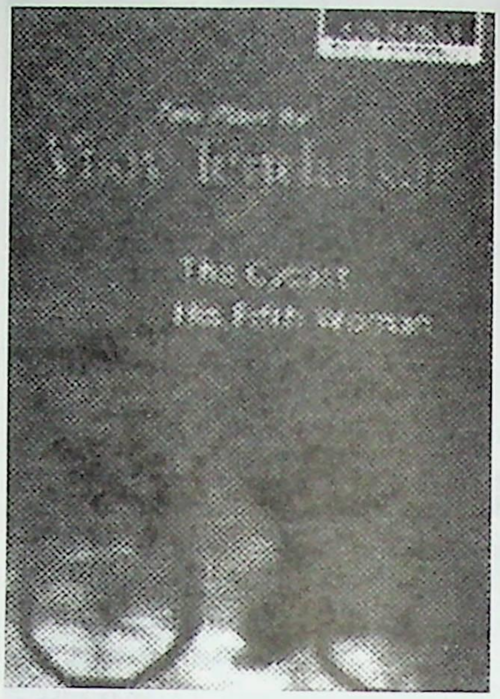
Sakharam has surfaced yet again in one more play of Tendulkar. It is called *His Fifth Woman* and it is one of the two plays included in this collection. Sakharam is like the detective in a popular crime fiction, who appears time and again to catch hopeless criminals. Sakharam, the book binder catches hopeless women, time and again. This one is his fifth. The rest were caught in Tendulkar's earlier play *Sakharam Binder*.

Surprisingly in his new incarnation Sakharam is less violent. He gets irritated of course but not violent. Even his abusiveness has become a mere vocabulary. I think, through these two plays, Tendulkar is not just moving away from violence, but from excessive realism itself. These two plays move, with total abandon, between the real and the magical.

Like in a popular film, Sakharam the Hindu, has a stereotypical Muslim friend named Dawood in *His Fifth Woman*. Dawood is decent and god fearing. Sakharam is not god fearing but decent. They have their own set of values. They are modern. Sakharam almost reminds me of Samuel Spade in Dashiel Hammett's *Maltese Falcon*. I like this subtle transformation that was taken place in Sakharam.

His Fifth Woman has a lot of black humour. There is this scene in heaven (or is it hell?), where the dead husband is looking for his lost dick. Sakharam's fifth woman happens to be the faithful second wife of this dickless and dead husband. In the brief period in which she stays with Sakharam, she lets him take her, with eyes closed, imagining that the dead husband is entering her. Sakharam is exasperated by this bizarre husbandry business. He is angry with the society for not letting him be what he wants to be. He wants to look after and be looked after, as long as it lasts.

Both the plays are translated very well. The English used in the translation is accessible. It has an Indian flavour and yet it can reach other audiences as well. All said and done Tendulkar is Tendulkar. Do read these two, very refreshing pieces of playwrighting. You will enjoy them.



I would have hated Tendulkar, if he had put all this dilemma in a middle-class intellectual. Middle-class intellectuals only think dilemmas. They do not enact it. Sakharam being the Indian version of a proletariat class enacts his role much better.

The present collection has two Tendulkar plays in it. The other being *The Cyclist*. *His Fifth Woman* is definitely more substantial than *The Cyclist*. *The Cyclist* has a lot of theatrical possibilities. And a lot more laughter probably. But laughter is a tricky business. Moliere for example sounds positively dumb when you read him. You should see him to believe how good he is in extracting laughter out of you. I would not laugh at *The Cyclist* jokes. May be I should see it done.

The problem with *The Cyclist* is that it does not move. I mean the cycle on stage actually does not move. It cannot move. If it moves, it will vanish into the wings within no time. But then the cyclist pedals, travels, meets highly dramatic characters, through the full length of this play. Tendulkar tries to make the motionlessness of the cycle (or the cyclist if you please) into a metaphor. It is a clever metaphor. But it shows.

In the end the cyclist is seen becoming a child, all over again, and sleeps off. There is also the proverbial spotlight in the end that shows up a bald patch on the head of this new born cyclist. The new born, and the old man are meeting in a metaphorical way at the end of the journey I suppose. It is a bit loaded for my sensibilities.

Both the plays are translated very well. The English used in the translation is accessible. It has an Indian flavour and yet it can reach other audiences as well. All said and done Tendulkar is Tendulkar. Do read these two, very refreshing pieces of playwrighting. You will enjoy them.■

Prasanna is with Kavi Kavya Trust, Karnataka.

Traversing the Tinsel World

Moinak Biswas

THE ART OF CINEMA: AN INSIDER'S JOURNEY THROUGH FIFTY YEARS OF FILM HISTORY
By B.D. Garga
Penguin Viking, India, 2005, pp. 258, Rs. 495.00

> The challenge to the film historian in India remains the collection of reliable facts. Garga's writings have always been of great help in this regard.

It is rare to come by a book on the 'art of cinema' anymore. With cinema itself becoming increasingly a product of divergent traditions, and the study of the medium given over to local specializations, one would today perhaps not venture to train one's sight on such an object. B.D. Garga himself called his informative book on Indian cinema *So Many Cinemas* (1996) as if to record his wonderment at the impossible array of tongues that the medium has spawned within a single nation, not just verbally, but in form and language. Such pluralities unsettle the very unity of cinematic art. It would be a matter of debate if there is one single artistic goal or endeavour that can cover the entirety of film practices, not to speak of the critical trend that has disposed of the question of art altogether in order to study the culture of cinema. The author, one of the oldest living cineastes in India—a filmmaker, critic and historian of Indian film whose work has been used by lay readers and scholars for five and a half decades now—does not necessarily end up proposing a universal model for film art. His belief is that through a survey of the widest possible range of films and filmmakers one can arrive at a sense of what is good in cinema, as well as how film has evolved through history. He was a leading member of the first generation of cineastes after Independence which looked upon the popularization of a normative film sense as an urgent task. It involved assimilation of currents of world cinema (a category that itself emerged around that time) even as it tried to formulate in bits and pieces a model for a new national cinema. Film education was part of the cultural agenda for development in early post-independence years. The first educators felt the need for inculcation of a general aesthetics of film, based on international standards, which would serve the purpose of a socially responsible cinema at home.

Garga, like his colleague Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, and some of his contemporaries in the Calcutta Film Society, had the advantage of practical experience in film production. He, moreover, had a first hand experience of film cultures abroad at an early age. In the fifties, he was already writing for *Sight and Sound* in the UK. His first book on Indian cinema was translated and circulated in the Soviet Union before he arrived there for filming Abbas's *Pardesi*. He was one of the first critics to write on the history of Indian cinema (most notably in *Filmfare* in the fifties). Unlike many other cineastes of his generation, however, he has always had an abiding interest in the common output of the Indian industry. *The Art of Cinema*, therefore, devotes sections to Eisenstein as well as K. Asif, Swedish cinema as well as Sohrab Modi's Historicals, Satyajit Ray as well as the Prabhat Film Company. An attempt to evaluate the artistic worth of this varied material would have not yielded much that is not already known. And it is not necessarily the art of cinema that the reader is asked to focus on moving through these disparate excursions into films and filmmakers. One learns about the spread and variety of the medium, its essentially heterogeneous trajectories, even about its occasional lack of formal identity. For the student of Indian cinema, it is also an important document of the process of assimilation Garga's generation of film scholars went through, and the paradigms they worked with.

The Foreword (by Dileep Padgaonkar) tells us about the virtue of the non-academic writing the author practises; it also points to the avoidance of ideology as a saving grace. The author echoes the latter point with regard to some of the films he revisits. As a liberal it is tantamount to the 'human' value of films to him. Some of his admired directors, however, would not agree with him on that point. Ideology, which is meant to stand in for politics here, would not only be a matter of thematic determination for them but the very motivation of innovation in language and form. To the extent a non-academic approach means avoidance of conceptual categories, the occasional vagueness of judgment points to its limits of effectiveness. The genre of criticism Garga belongs to cannot avoid a lack of definition in analysis, it is inevitably forced to stop at saying how certain elements in a work are good or beautiful, or how a film is great because of its humanist sentiment, leaving the reader guessing about what distinguishes the large variety of films that attract such descriptions.

In the absence of conceptual connections, or unifying formal propositions, what becomes of lasting value in Garga's book are the empirical information and autobiographical reflections. Thus the musings on film craft in the first section, essays written in the early eighties, look more aged now than his remembrance of films and directors from the thirties, forties or fifties. The latter is enlivened by the insider's knowledge, and is often laced with significant pieces of information. The challenge to the film historian in India remains the collection of reliable facts. Garga's writings have always been of great help in this regard. He does not mention sources in the book, but like the little nugget of interview with Ardeshir Irani, maker of the first sound film in India, the chronicle of the German lineage of V. Shantaram's style in *Amritmanthan*, the observation on the Vinoba Bhave connection of Raj Kapoor's *Jis Desh Men Ganga Behti Hai*, or the story of Babubhai Mehta's strange 'originality' in writing the story of *Aurat*—brilliant little chronicles shed unexpected light on well-known films and personalities. But perhaps the most valuable chronicle is the one about his own life in cinema ('Fragments of a Life'), one that meanders through Bombay, Lahore, London, Paris, Moscow—capitals of filmmaking, bringing us up close to Garga's encounters with films, and with people committed to the image—Manto, Ray, Cartier-Bresson, Georges Sadoul and Henri Langlois. What emerges from the journey he charts in the book is the impression of a man deeply grateful to cinema, drawing lasting sustenance from the love that he has borne the medium. And the impression of a world that emerges through the collection is one that is a habitat of cinema, a home where Indian cinema belonging to a certain past has found its place beside films from distant, alluring horizons.■

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Indian Freedom Movement—The British Element

A.K. Damodaran

CRUSADER EXTRAORDINARY: KRISHNA MENON AND THE INDIA LEAGUE 1932-1936
By Suhash Chakravarty
India Research Press, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 816, price not stated.

This is the third volume in an ambitious project to analyse the history of the Indian Freedom Movement in the metropolitan country, Great Britain, from the late twenties to the attainment of Independence. The first two volumes dealt with Krishna Menon's evolution as a social activist and intellectual through various phases—boy scout leader, voluntary theosophist, and a very young probationary political activist in Britain. These volumes take us upto 1932, a few months after the Second Round Table conference, in which Gandhiji played the major role. That volume was most memorable for Krishna Menon's personal contribution to supporting Gandhiji in London at a difficult moment. In this third volume, from 1932-1936, we see the India League developing into an important political organization in the United Kingdom, fully a part of the establishment, but carefully cultivating the dissentient voices, particularly in the Labour Party, on the central topic of British colonialism in India. Towards the end of the present volume Jawaharlal Nehru, who had been in prison most of the period, comes out of jail and becomes a friend and colleague of Krishna Menon, during his visit to Europe on a purely personal matter—the illness of his wife. The next volume promises to be eventful in the first three years before the beginning of the Second World War, both in the development of Krishna Menon as a major figure in the elite intellectual circles of London, as well as an important participant in the European struggle against authoritarianism.

It was during the early thirties that the India League became a major factor in political propaganda in Britain. Krishna Menon organized a team of young people and published a journal to acquaint the British public about the developments in India. This was a period of some activity on the part of the ruling establishment in Britain and in India—the lengthy period of preparing for a semi-independent Federation, in which the "Native States" would also be involved. There was a detailed controversy about the future of the British Administration, in which the Secretary of State, Samuel Hoare, and the Viceroy in Delhi, Willingdon, were active in an aggressively partisan manner. To oppose them, Krishna Menon had successfully attracted distinguished British intellectuals like Bertrand Russell, the Chairman of the India League at this time, Professor Harold Laski, and the great labour politician, George Lansbury.

In India, there was a vacuum because both Gandhi and Nehru were in prison, but Krishna Menon kept immediate contact with Madan Mohan Malaviya, the then President of the Congress for a short interregnum, and his son Govind Malaviya. The discussions in the *London Letters* of Krishna Menon mainly dealt with the inevitability of complete freedom for India in the modern international context. This meant also the follow-up of these pamphlets with any number of meetings in the various cities and towns of Britain in which Krishna Menon and his dear colleagues, Krishna and Mary Shelvankar were involved. Barbara McNamara took over the day-to-day administration of the India League. There were also young recruits most of them Indian students studying in Britain.

The central topic in this volume is the sending of a small India League delegation in 1932 for ten weeks to India to study the condition of the country after the imprisonment of the senior leaders and after the cessation of political activity of various types in India after the Meet Conspiracy Trials, and the Government action against the fledgling Communist Movement. There was a great deal of discussion in India on the Government's Constitutional Agenda centering round a Federation. The delegation's job was to analyse the physical situation in the country, both in the cities and the villages, at a crucial moment in the evolution of the British India relationship. The delegation included two distinguished English women, Ellen Wilkinson and Monica Whately, and Leonard Matters, a radical journalist and Krishna Menon himself.

The book gives us, in graphic detail, the methods used by Menon and his colleagues to garner funds for the delegation's tour of India, primarily from Congress sources, even though every care was taken to distance the delegation from any type of identification with the Congress. The delegation members were extremely careful not to alienate the bureaucracy. Chakravarty draws on not merely the Krishna Menon papers, but also the internal correspondence of the British Indian establishment, as now revealed in the India Office archives. A total three-dimensional picture thus emerges of the several forces active in India encouraging the delegation and also trying to frustrate it. The return of the delegation at the end of 1932 faced the India League with a major challenge—whether to publish the Report of the delegation and when. We are told how all the inevitable financial and organizational problems were tackled by Krishna Menon and his senior colleagues, Laski and Lansbury, and how the book was published in 1934 as the Official Report of the India League delegation.

The British Government proscribed the book in India and it became a non-event as far as the Indian National Movement is concerned. It was only two or three years ago that Professor Chakravarty published with an analytical introduction the text of the Report under the title *Condition of India*. That volume should be studied as a supplement to this third volume of the India League history.

The most exciting thing about this book is how the Indian Freedom Movement in India and abroad is projected against the major developments in Europe in the thirties. Fascist counter revolution in Italy had earlier begun the process of authoritarianism. This was intensified and became the major development in Europe with Hitler's advent to power precisely during this period. This was the intellectual background against which Krishna Menon evolved as a major political propagandist in the English society. It should also not be forgotten that it was precisely during this period that Menon completed his battle against personal financial difficulties and became a fully qualified barrister and a member of the Inns of Court in London. This is an important detail which has to be emphasized. Chakravarty scrupulously avoids personal details. This is a biography with political appendices. It is the history of the Indian Freedom Movement in Britain centered round the magnetic figure of one single individual.

Some 'neo-sceptics' have recently wondered whether it was worthwhile—all this effort to study the India League and Krishna Menon. The answer is simple. In the total evolution of the Indian National Movement, whether it was in South Africa with Gandhi or in the United States with Hardayal and Lajpat Rai, with Viren Chattopadhyaya and Hardayal again, and M.N. Roy in Europe, the central role had to be inevitably borne by the representatives of the Indian people in the metropolitan country. That is why this book had to be written in all its carefully collected documentary details where, not merely the public propaganda in London's Hyde Park and various English cities like Bristol and Manchester is projected against the parallel background of the struggle between the moderates and the hardliners in all political parties in Britain. In a sense, this scrupulously researched story of the British element in the Indian Freedom Movement will have its own place among the various contributions to the *Towards Freedom Project* of the Indian Council of Historical Research and the selected works of M.N. Roy, Lajpat Rai and, of course, the great Indian socialists abroad including Palme Dutt and Saklatvala. After this four-volume masterpiece is completed, Professor Chakravarty may like to publish two more books: one, a short monograph giving the whole story and the other, a compilation of all the documents mentioned in each chapter. It is more such volumes that we need, not less.■

A.K. Damodaran, a former diplomat, is the author of two books, one on Jawaharlal Nehru and the other on *India's Foreign Policy*, and has been reviewing books for *The Book Review* since the early years.

East India Company to Independence

Chandrika Kaul

THE LION AND THE TIGER: THE RISE AND FALL OF THE BRITISH RAJ, 1600-1947
By Denis Judd
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2004, pp. 200, Rs. 345.00

This is a short book on a very long and tumultuous period of Indian history and Judd is ambitious in tracing the rise and fall of the East India Company rule and the subsequent British Raj in this summary fashion. However, this concise account is written in the best traditions of popular history and is aimed, one would surmise, primarily at the general reader rather than an academic audience *per se*. But while there are no novel interpretations or new data presented, it nevertheless has much to commend it.

The book covers the years 1600-1947 with the help of ten chapters and a short epilogue. It follows in its schematic structure the pattern of established text books on the subject – the narrative begins predictably with a sweeping account of the beginnings of the East India Company's trading interests in the spectacular wealth of the East at the end of the 16th century and ends with the denouement of Independence with Partition in 1947. The intervening years cover the standard narrative of the consolidation of British crown rule through coercion and conciliation, the rise of Indian nationalism, the establishment of the major political parties like the Congress and the League, the towering presence of Gandhi and the creed of nonviolent noncooperation, the cataclysmic impact of the two World Wars, the apogee of the forces of separatism and communalism in the interwar years and the various, often unsuccessful, British attempts at a constitutional handover of power.

Even within the self-imposed limitations of a book of this nature, a more creative approach to the narrative and the schematization could have been adopted and this is a somewhat missed opportunity. However, there is a reassuring attempt to not simply supply a political overview but also to highlight the socio-cultural aspects of this imperial encounter and it is in these sections that the book is most interesting and successful. For instance, Judd argues that as the Raj consolidated its power the relationship at a social level between the British and the Indians lessened, the primary exceptions being the Indian Princes and the Indian aristocracy who continued to receive favour. The role of British women in India is apposite in this connection, especially with the opening of the Suez canal in 1869, when larger numbers crossed the seas and it was possible to have viable white-only communities with their own attendant problems, problems vividly captured by Rudyard Kipling and by E. M. Forster in *A Passage to India*. As Judd notes, 'British women in India became notorious for their gossip, the passing on of juicy bits of scandal became a pastime for many, almost an art'. (p. 55).

A pleasing aspect of the study is the use of colourful, insightful (though often rather lengthy) contemporary quotations which punctuate the text and help enlighten a theme or give voice to a protagonist, though the perspective is primarily a British one – the gaze of the colonizers and of the ruling classes. Thus, we hear from Viceroys like Dalhousie, Mayo, and Curzon, as well as politicians like Gladstone, from Anglo-Indian writers like Kipling and Flora Anne Steel, and from the rank and file Briton serving in the army or civil service. The voice of the subaltern and of Indians are occasionally heard. For instance, Judd quotes Sita Ram, an Indian officer in the East India Company's services, who in his book *From Sepoy to Subedar* argued that in the pre-Rebellion years, "I always was good friends with the English soldiery and they formally used to treat the sepoys with great kindness, these soldiers are of a different caste now—neither so fine nor so tall as they were. They seldom can speak one word of our language, except abuse" (p.74). Another attractive quality of the book is the numerous evocative images and illustrations that accompany the text.

In the epilogue, Judd deploys passages from a number of English writers like George Orwell, Edward Thompson, William Buchan (son of the novelist John Buchan), as well as Forster, to throw light upon and describe the mutual perceptions of Indians and the British: perceptions about the Raj, perceptions about western and Indian culture, perceptions about Independence and freedom. Judd concludes that at the end of the day Britain, Pakistan, Bangladesh and India have a special relationship that is 'complex, affectionate, confused and significant'. This is a reliable and useful introduction to the subject for the general reader written with Judd's characteristic verve and style and would recommend it on those counts.■

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Zebunissa, Her Relatives and the Period

Meena Bhargava

CAPTIVE PRINCESS: ZEBUNISSA, DAUGHTER OF EMPEROR AURANGZEB
By Annie Krieger Krynicki
Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2005, pp. xvii + 216, Rs. 450.00

This book written in French by Annie Krieger Krynicki has been translated into English by Enjum Hamid. The book in itself has interesting details on Mughal culture and politics, life in the Mughal court and *zenana*, personal lives and traits of the Mughal Prince and Princess and the romantic liaisons of Dara Shikoh, Jahanara, Roshnara and above all Aurangzeb. The portrayal of Aurangzeb as sensitive, sensual and romantic is noteworthy, which is in complete contrast to the conventional wisdom on him. The exhaustive descriptions of the imperial military expeditions of Shahjahan and Aurangzeb, the political pragmatism of Jahanara and Roshnara, the Sufi *silsilahs*, astrology in the Mughal court and Mughal life and many such narratives hold the attention of the reader throughout. But then, one wonders about Zebunissa, the heroine of this book, on whom the book is actually supposed to focus. The details on her as compared to the other Mughals are meagre and rather inadequate to justify the title of the book.

Given the title of the book and the chapters, one expects to read about Zebunissa, the person, the poet, the princess. However, all chapters uniformly subordinate her to the description of her relatives – her grandfather, father, uncles and aunts. A line or a paragraph or at the most two paragraphs is what they devote to Zebunissa. For instance, in an involved discussion of the politics and military expedition of Shahjahan and Aurangzeb, the author makes a sole, insignificant mention of Zebunissa i.e. "inspite of her precocity, little Zebunissa must have been fascinated by this excess of opulence and colour" (p. 46) or that when Aurangzeb was leaving for an expedition to Qandhar, Zebunissa was "more fearful than the others in the *zenana*" (p. 46). Such statements convey little about Zebunissa except that she like all other Princesses was also awed by Mughal wealth and loved her father.

Although all chapters are insufficient on Zebunissa, we will take the example of chapter 3, entitled 'Zebunissa and the Poets and the Sufis' to illustrate our point. Looking at the title of the chapter, one expects a discussion of Zebunissa's association with the Sufis and the poets. To the contrary, the chapter devotes itself to details, no doubt interesting, on the Sufi *silsilahs* and their influence and thereby a deep involvement of Dara Shikoh and Jahanara in the Sufi practices. Zebunissa finds just a line at the end of an intense discussion. Elaborating on the five major schools of Sufism i.e. Qadiri, Chishti, Naqshbandi, Suhrawardi and the Shattari, which played an important role in the socio-cultural and political life of the Mughals, the author simply says "Zebunissa was associated with all of them except the Suhrawardis at different times and for different reasons" (p. 56). Then, at yet another place in the book, the author says that it was because of the influence of Jahanara and particularly her uncle, Dara Shikoh that Zebunissa began to study the Qadiri school of thought. Instead of such nondescript dismissal of Zebunissa, had the author reflected on her interactions and involvement with the Sufis and the Sufi practices, it would have provided a better understanding and assessment of Zebunissa, the Sufi and the poet.

Inspired by the moving verses of *Diwan i' Makhfi*, Krynicki had undertaken this project to solve the enigma, the puzzle of the 'Captive Princess'. Influenced by the mystical power and poetry of Nur Jahan, Zebunissa had assumed the pen name, *Makhfi* (the hidden one/ the concealed). Forty-five years after her death in 1752, Magan Lal and Duncan Westbrook had compiled her scattered writings and published them under the title of *Diwan i' Makhfi*. It comprises 421 *ghazals* and several quatrains. Her verses are poignant, beautiful and poetic but reflect a secret depth of thought and feeling. Adhering to the conventional poetic idioms of the time, Zebunissa writes about the afflicted lover, intoxication from love or wine, the tavern, the *saqi*, the garden. However, despite these varied themes, her verses convey sadness, emotional loss and melancholy. On the basis of *Diwan i' Makhfi*, chroniclers like Magan Lal, Duncan Westbrook and others could appreciate and admire her poetry, her intelligence and contributions to literature but none could unravel the mystery that surrounded her personal life or the secret of her tragedy. As the author says, "she never lifted the veil" (p. 124) and *Makhfi* remains an enigma (p. 186).

Zebunissa was the first child of Dilras Begum and Aurangzeb and also a favourite daughter of Aurangzeb, for whom he made several exceptions, whether it was regarding her education or her desire to marry Aqil Khan, her loved one. What is significantly interesting in the book is the different characterization of Aurangzeb. Rising above the strict, politically pragmatic sovereign, he comes across as a sensitive, loving father, who took keen interest in the religious education of his daughter and trained her personally in the recitation of Quran. Setting aside customary norms (festive occasions were organized to reward the tutor only when the sons recited certain chosen passages of Quran before the distinguished male guests) Aurangzeb hosted a splendid ceremony when Zebunissa learnt to recite the Quran at the tender age of seven. And, to commemorate the event, he lavishly rewarded her female tutor, Hafiza Maryam.

Aurangzeb, in fact, had brought up Zebunissa like a Prince and encouraged her to learn the art and techniques of war and administration, which were traditionally taught only to the Princes. Such solicitous affection of Aurangzeb had made Zebunissa an independent, spirited girl and she often reacted to her father's strictness "with an affectionate ridicule" (p. 101).

A favourite of her father, Zebunissa accompanied Aurangzeb on his military expeditions and military camps. As *Padshah Begum*, she was different from Roshnara, who was known for her cold pragmatism. Zebunissa's concept was that of a benevolent empire. We may cite an incident of Aurangzeb's indulgence towards his daughter. Allegedly, Zebunissa had pleaded for mercy for her maternal grandfather, Shah Nawaz, though he had opposed Aurangzeb during the war of succession. Aurangzeb, relenting to his daughter, not only pardoned Shah Nawaz but also made him a *subadar* and increased his *mansab*. The author notes, "this show of compassion is one of the few humane incidents in the dark history of the war of succession" (p. 92). It appears that Aurangzeb subsequently regretted his decision on Shah Nawaz and his favourite daughter's intervention and resolved not to let his emotions or women influence his decisions. The Emperor thus became wary of Zebunissa's "soft-hearted advice in politics" (p. 93).

Contrasting Zebunissa with Roshnara, the author suggests that unlike Roshnara, Zebunissa was modest and had no political aspirations. She became instead the model of beauty at the Mughal court. Krynicki gives a brief portrait of Zebunissa and elaborately describes her teeth, nose and skin. Noted for her black veil, the ladies of the court emulated the fashions of Zebunissa and "cast admiring or covetous glances towards her" (p. 94). Krynicki connects the Princess's way of dressing with her commitment to knowledge. She suggests that Zebunissa wore black because black gowns are a symbol of studying a vocation or searching for knowledge. In Islam, black is the colour of scholars and wise men. Later in life, however, Zebunissa abandoned her black veil, evidently after her broken affair with Aqil Khan and the bleak spells of her father. She took to wearing white in Salimgarh prison, near Dellhi, where Aurangzeb had imprisoned her for supporting the political conspiracies of Prince Akbar. She stayed here till her death. It was during her sojourn in Salimgarh that her verses acquired more sensitivity and maturity and her poetry reached the culmination of passion and aesthetics.

The book, on the whole, is interesting and absorbing and has enchanting details on the different Mughals. However, had it focused exclusively on Zebunissa, the appreciation and admiration for the Princess would have been enhanced. More importantly, it would have justified the title of the book.■

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A Monumental Legacy

Jagat S. Mehta

NEPAL-INDIA AND NEPAL-CHINA RELATIONS BETWEEN 1947-JUNE 2005 (5 VOLUMES)
Edited by A.S. Bhasin
Geetika Publishers, New Delhi, 2005, Set price Rs. 6000.00

This is a monumental work; it could not be fully compensated monetarily for the years of labour which were fired primarily by commitment to historicity. Since he retired 14 years ago, I have seen Bhasin, day in and day out, hard at work in the library of the India International Centre, reading, compiling, photographing, and obviously worrying that material of importance, including meaningful public comment might get omitted; there were only occasional breaks when he could be seen at his favourite table in the cafeteria. He had obviously banished all competing social interests. This is the real stuff of a true academic mind.

Bhasin's previous compilations show the magnitude of the task to which he has been dedicated in a single-minded way over these years.

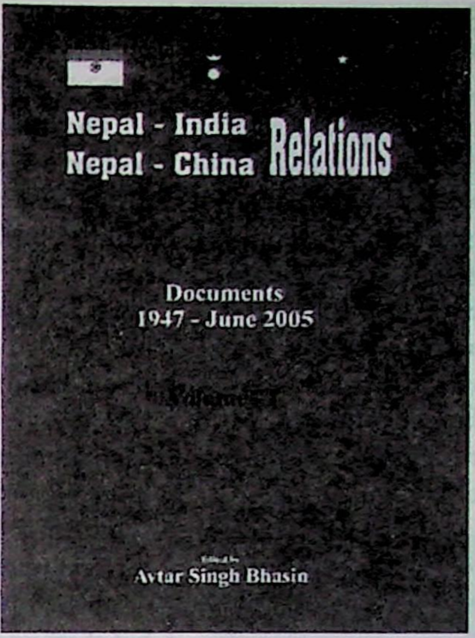
Partition: Some Called it Partition, Some Freedom, Last 75 days of the Raj (1998)
India-Bangladesh 1971-2002 (5 volumes)
India-Sri Lanka and Sri Lankan Ethnic Conflict (5 volumes)
India's Foreign Policy 2004 and 2005
India in Sri Lanka: Between the Lion and the Tigers

The five volumes on Nepal-India and Nepal-China relations is probably his *magnum opus*. The list of documents continues seriatim from Vol. 1 and the last item in Vol. V is 1501 at page 3584. Incidentally, significantly it is an editorial in *Rising Nepal* dated 5 December 2003, which carries an appreciative comment on two separate agreements on China's aid for development activities.

Bhasin has not taken the easy path of putting together these documents chronologically but classified them subject-wise for easy reference. Vol. I, Section 1 starts with an item entitled "Nepal is a sovereign independent state". It is the text of a reply dated 22 July 1949 from General Bijay Shamsher, Director General, Foreign Affairs to a note from the Chairman of the Committee on the Admission of New Members in the UN organization. The Committee had sent the text of the resolution it adopted on 26.5.1949 and enclosed the Secretariat paper and the record of the relevant proceedings. The Nepalese reply offers comments and amendments on the Secretarial paper. The six enclosures give texts of previous treaties of Nepal, notably the treaty with the British Indian Government signed on 23rd December 1923. It also contains the text of the treaty of Sewgolie of 1815 with the East India Company and the 1792 treaty following the defeat of Nepal by China, the 1856 treaty after a victory over Tibet and the 1860 post-mutiny treaty, which was a sort of reward to the Rana oligarchy for assistance in the suppression of the "mutiny". It lists diplomatic missions of Nepal from 1850 onwards to and from foreign countries. The essential thrust made by the Nepalese Foreign Ministry, was that though Nepal had had exclusive standing relations with the British (Indian) government for 150 years previous to the transfer of power in India, Nepal was always sovereign and independent.

Documents 2 to 687 cover India-Nepal political relations. It throws light on the background leading to the conclusion of the Treaty of 1950, the escape of King Tribhuvan, the Rana's recognition and the eventual revocation of "the Boy King" Gyanendra. Bhasin's compilation reproduces long letters and extensive notes of Nehru himself. They are quintessentially Nehruvian. Time after time, he acknowledges Nepal's historical independence but also alludes to India's commitment to championing freedom round the world, crusading against tyranny, authoritarianism and racial discrimination everywhere. He is on guard against the charge of interference, but he is not totally unsympathetic to demands for reforms and democratization of the Rana regime led by fellow freedom fighters. He shows urgent concern for the contagion of militant ides of Communism flowing out of Tibet, but it does not amount to overbearing counsel to Nepal. What comes through is articulated poetically during Nehru's visit to Kathmandu in 1951, "Nepal: a mountain girl; Nepal, the daughter of the Himalayas, the younger sister of India etc." and this reflects the deep down conviction that the two countries have a common intertwined destiny.

Section III in Vol. II is on the Development of Water Resources; Vol. III covers the tortuous ups and down with India firmly believing in a common umbrella for "Trade and Transit" and Nepal that bracketing was a slur on its independence. Vol. IV is on Economic Cooperation for development and India-Nepal Boundary Questions and Vol. V is exclusively on Nepal-China relations in all aspects.



I do not know of any other scholar who has put together so much contemporary raw material on relations with the neighbours. Only Pakistan and Bhutan are not fully covered; the latter will be brief and easy but the former will be a massive task going well beyond the last 75 days of 1947. I hope he will nevertheless attempt it and so make himself the preeminent custodian of India's diplomatic archives. These volumes would become compulsory reference for Foreign Service officers posted to the concerned divisions in the ministry or the respective capitals and invaluable for prospective authors of every academic specialization.

When I was asked to launch the Ministry's Policy Planning Division in 1966 and was, perhaps the first to argue that success or otherwise of the country's foreign policy hinged on relations with our neighbours, I wish I had had such compilations. Bhasin's work builds on his service in the historical division of the ministry and as an Officer on Special Duty in the Nepal division itself. But it is his love of history and interest in South Asia, which led to this service to future historians and operational officers. All of us associated with the Foreign Service must salute Avtar Singh Bhasin.

I would like to illustrate from my own experience that without availability of guidance sources there is the terrible risk of the happenstances in bureaucratic deployment which makes functioning very hazardous. My first two postings were in Europe with German and French as my languages. I had not even been to Calcutta when in 1956 I was assigned to the "Eastern Division" as Deputy Secretary to deal with NEFA, Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim, Tibet and the Fat East. China was the least troublesome part of my charge, but after the Sino-Indian crisis in 1959, it became the most important. When leading the Indian official team for the six-month long discussions, for the first time we consulted the files—sometimes 100 years old and often in district archives or travellers tales—to get the historical background. Fortunately, the Chinese had even poorer access to the archives which at times were reposited in Tibetan monasteries and were even more perfunctory. China remained in my horoscope for the next 23 years but I was embarrassed to be considered a pseudo-expert

while I was only training on the job. There was only Richardson's *Tibetan Precis*, but if some of Bhasin's compilations had been available, it would have provided convenient reference, at least on part of my charge, which included Nepal. We do not even weed and print our old files now as was done regularly in British times.

Policy making is far too often based on half-baked conveniently remembered history, sometimes from experience of a posting, often only in an adjacent country and at times, as happened to me, in a different continent. There is great risk when we start in ignorance and get influenced often by populist thinking. As Foreign Secretary, I used to tell new colleagues to spend at least three months studying non-current files just to be vaguely aware of past decisions and debate.

As a preliminary, Bhasin has a 40 pages long Introduction summarizing his own analysis, which ends with a thoughtful advice on policy. It starts with the situation as prevailed in 2005 after King Gyanendra suspended the Nepalese Parliament and the functioning of the multi-party democracy. The King's assumption was that to fight the Maoist insurgency required a firm authoritarian hand, but he was ill-advised in thinking that in the 21st century, democracy can be smothered by coercion. There could be no return to feudal governance as prevailed under the Rana oligarchy or even under a controlled Panchayat system. Notwithstanding the intertwined geographical, cultural, religious and ethnic links with the south, India too did not realize that modern diplomacy demands a sense of equality between unequal neighbours. Nepal has hurtled toward self-destruction, but India also did not grasp that it was its duty to arrest this propensity in its own self-interest. Even Nehru was wishful in thinking that Nepal would see its own future in not getting out of step with India on foreign and defence policies. Facing the post-Partition security demands, specially after the infiltration and conflict in Kashmir, independent India requested the loan of ten battalions of the Royal Nepalese Army for internal security duties as had been agreed during World War II. The Rana regime agreed to the request and this was a factor in Nehru authorizing the signing of the 1950 treaty for an indefinite duration, overlooking the demands for political reforms from comrades and fellow freedom fighters like the Koirala brothers. When India sponsored Nepal for the UN and to attend the Afro-Asian conference at Bandung, Nehru did not foresee the India-China crisis and that King Mahendra and even the Nepali politicians would pursue their own variant of nonalignment between the two big neighbours of the country. There was a real failure of anticipation of the rise of Nepalese nationalism and the creeping revulsion at the suspected overbearing attitude of India. After he succeeded in 1955 King Mahendra purposefully established independent international contacts with China, the Soviet Union and the USA and its officers and scholars researched the rights of other land-locked countries.

Bhasin's introductory essay dwells on other problems of Nepal-India relationship such as the insistence on separating Trade and Transit which contributed to the disastrous postponement of the development of Nepal's natural assets. The tumbling southward flowing rivers have the second largest hydel potential in the world, but it could only be viable if bracketed with the sale of surplus to power-thirsty India. The complimentarity was obvious, but India's insistence on a privileged position in the construction did not appreciate Nepal's aversion to reinforce dependence on the big neighbour. Neither could do without the other, but there was reinforcing irrationality on both sides. As he recalls, it all started when the Indian engineers had showed insensitivity in the first projects for flood control and irrigation on the Kosi and Gandak during the fifties. The dams were located to give maximum benefit to Bihar but lowering the costs caused extensive submergence in Nepal. This lack of foresight seriously undermined the faith in the altruism of India.

There has been built-in parochialism in Nepal-India relations. I remember as Foreign Secretary, I found that the Nepal Division marshalled all the international precedents to favour lower riparians while the Bangladesh Division was supporting our claim on Farakka on the Ganges as an upper riparian. This compartmentalization and narrow perspective was evident as late as 2002 when some intellectuals including foreign service officers in reacting to the terrorist attack on our Parliament wanted the Indus Treaty abrogated—quite overlooking that India was lower riparian to Nepal and China.

The fact of the matter is that there is nothing in diplomacy of the 20th / 21st century as difficult as relations between unequal neighbours. Little Nepal by its own desertification has caused disproportionate harm to downstream Bihar, UP and further downstream to West Bengal and Bangladesh. The American political failure around the world, most recently in Iraq, has a close parallel to India in its relations to the South Asian neighbours, most particularly in Nepal. Some envoys tactfully overcame the seated reservations of Nepal but others unconsciously confirmed the suspicion of arrogance and not necessarily benign superiority, and outraged sensitive nationalism of the Nepalese people. However tactfully done, even Nehru should not have publicly deplored King Mahendra's dismissal of the Nepal Congress government in 1960. The setback to the climate of relations was only repaired after 5 years by Lal Bahadur Shastri who was able to stoop to assuage Nepalese feelings.

Bhasin in his introduction contrasts Nepal with Bhutan. In Bhutan, Nehru was a consummate diplomat after his difficult Himalayan trek in 1958. He urged Bhutan to safeguard its independence, offered India's cooperation in education, road accessibility and training infrastructure, but only on acceptable terms to the recipient country. The direct road enabled the development of a 400 MV hydel project on Chuka and, as a result, Bhutan is already an island of prosperity. The earnings from the sale of power to India cover 45% of Bhutan's domestic budget. The potential of Nepal was about two hundred times greater.

In my view, Bhasin does not fully recognize that India should have better grasped the propensity of sovereign myopia in Nepal. China was more sophisticated in assuaging the suspected threat to the monarchy and kept strictly under wraps its ideological sympathies with the local Communists and 'Maoists'. Predictably China exploited the Nepalese aversion to permanent dependence on India. The Kodari road to Tibet became gratuitously important, at least psychologically, when we re-linked trade and transit in 1989.

The bottomline is that a failed Nepal will be ultimately India's diplomatic failure. Bhasin's conclusion, however, is unchallengeable. India needs to modernize its relations with Nepal. However difficult, India should actively offer to bring the 1950 treaty upto date, but it might squeeze the present one-sided benefits for Nepal; imbalance in trade, Gurkha recruitment, employment opportunities for Nepalese nationals and other handicaps of free access to India. Finally, as between USA and Canada, the simmering anger at dependence may have to be swallowed for tangible economic benefits but the mix should be made less repugnant to political and public opinion in Nepal.

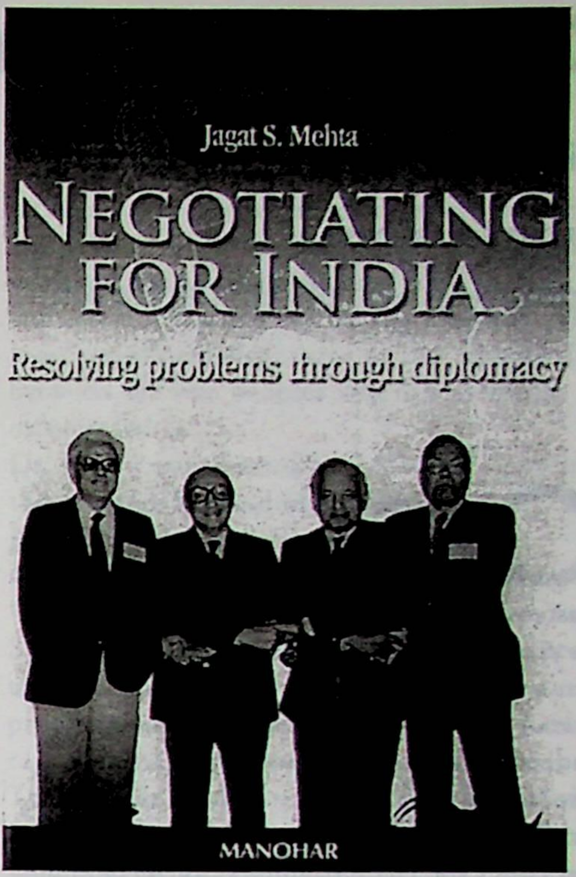
In the post-Cold War world, SAARC may provide the real answer. It could bring a bonus of benefits to all members in South Asian regional fraternity. All of us in a South Asia are dependent on the Himalayas and the common monsoon clouds. We must recognize that the welfare of the millions of poor in South Asia requires that the common rivers are developed for optimum benefits to upper, middle and lower riparians. The Cold War benefit of blackmail, including the Nepalese variant implied in King Birendra's idea of the Zone of Peace was a thing of the past. We too should never have publicly talked of a "special" relationship, but, as now only counsel offered discreetly. Nepal's development and democracy have to be promoted without unconsciously fuelling anti-Indianism, but India should also not over-react if Nepal seizes an opportunity to show off its own independence. As long as the Himalayas are not flattened, the destiny of both lies in dynamic cooperation and interdependence.■

Jagat S. Mehta is a former Foreign Secretary of India.

Lessons from History

B.G. Verghese

NEGOTIATING FOR INDIA: RESOLVING PROBLEMS THROUGH DIPLOMACY
By Jagat S. Mehta
Manohar Books, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 296, Rs. 750.00



There are many facets of diplomacy. Ambassadorial memoirs most often offer a ringside view of the great political, security and economic issues of the day. Jagat Mehta, a former Foreign Secretary, has a lot to tell in this genre and has, indeed, done so elsewhere. But this volume dwells on seven episodes of conflict resolution in which he played a major role and provides a useful compendium of case studies in this regard.

Among the most interesting is the tortuous and continuing saga pertaining to the India-China Boundary Settlement that came to notice in the mid-1950s and is currently in an advanced stage of patient negotiation. On attaining Independence, India published its maps depicting its northern boundary as inherited from the Raj. This was based on customary usage, the watershed principle and Anglo-Chinese treaties. A mute response by the Chinese, with a throwaway remark that it had still to correct its old maps, papered over the claim to most of Arunachal up to the foothills in North Assam and left matters ambiguous. The Dalai Lama's flight from Lhasa in 1959, after Nehru had persuaded him to return home from India in 1956, and the hostile comment in the *People's Daily* virtually accusing the Indian Prime Minister of instigating the revolt in Tibet, was, in Mehta's opinion, the turning point. Previous warmth, built around the Panch Shila, gave way to conflict and confrontation.

Mehta, then a middle rung officer, was pitchforked into becoming the pointsman handling China relations in the External Affairs Ministry. He subsequently led the Indian side at the India-China boundary talks that ended in a stalemate. It is his view that Nehru's decision to grant the Dalai Lama and some 100,000 Tibetans asylum in India helped save the Tibetan language and culture from possible extinction. After years of acrimony and stalemate, India-China relations are now on the mend, but a final resolution of the boundary question is still awaited.

Indo-Pakistan relations were, if anything, even more prickly. The separation of Bangladesh had been a searing experience for Pakistan. This had been preceded in January 1971 by the hijacking of an Indian Airlines plane to Lahore and its destruction there. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto had applauded the hijackers and Pakistan refused to hand over the culprits. India thereupon suspended Pakistan overflights across India, compelling Pakistan aircraft to fly from Karachi to Dhaka via Colombo. Pakistan had responded by filing a complaint against India with the International Civil Aviation Organization for violation of its air traffic rights.

Though there had been some improvement, Indo-Pakistan relations were still strained and road and rail connections remained suspended when Mehta became Foreign Secretary in 1976.

Just prior to this Bhutto had written to Mrs Gandhi pleading for normalization of relations. The new Foreign Secretary was charged with leading a delegation to Islamabad to negotiate this task. This was successfully concluded, after Pakistan withdrew its unjustified complaint with ICAO, and an MOU was signed restoring connectivity as well as diplomatic ties at ambassadorial level and the reopening of consulates at Karachi and Bombay. Patient diplomacy and personal contacts helped build confidence and trust that held even when another Indian Aircraft was hijacked and flown to Lahore. On this occasion, the passengers and aircraft were released and India did not press for the return of the Kashmiri hijackers.

Negotiations followed on the Sallal Dam in J&K to overcome Pakistan's objections to its alleged pondage and design on the ground that this could be used to store water and dry up the Chenab or release the stored waters and flood out Pakistan – both of these used as a strategic weapon in times of war! Mehta discussed this absurd theory with Bhutto and on the basis of calculations of the Chenab valley's geometry and Sallal pondage was able to persuade him that the real damage, physically and monetarily, in either case would be to India and that Pakistan was too far down river to be really affected. Sallal was cleared. However, the same objection was again raised by Pakistan on the Baglihar Dam, upstream of Sallal, and the matter is currently being heard by a Neutral Expert under the Indus Treaty. Some prejudices die hard!

Another water issue Mehta negotiated related to sharing the Ganga below Farakka with Bangladesh. Here his interlocutor was not an old college mate like Agha Shahi but a new found friend, B.M. Abbas, an engineer. Mehta states that India's original attitude smacked too much of the discredited Harmon doctrine of absolute upper riparian rights over water and it was the wise diplomacy of Jagjivan Ram that recognized Bangladesh's legitimate needs, resulting in the Ganges Treaty of 1977-82, that was only finally cemented in a long term agreement in 1996, though without the minimum guarantee clause. It is Mehta's view that, as in the case of the Indus, the logic of a unified basin approach to developing the full potential of the Ganges system to mutual benefit was foreclosed by narrow nationalism, resulting in years of beggar-my-neighbour policies and a high price in terms of the opportunity costs of delay.

Giving Nepal its due on trade and transit and getting compensation from Idi Amin for expropriated Indian properties in Uganda were two other diplomatic cameos Mehta portrays. In all cases, friendly diplomacy and a willingness to be sympathetic to a smaller neighbour like Nepal worked. Foresight and far-sightedness are obviously important. And in the case of the Simla Agreement with Pakistan in 1972, Mehta is right in lamenting the "incomplete agenda" that India adopted at a time when it held all the trumps. Ultimately, it was Bhutto, playing a very weak hand, who ran away with the prize.

These are the ifs and buts of history. Nonetheless they do offer lessons that should be heeded. In recalling old history, with new insights, Mehta's reminiscences help us to renegotiate the future with the larger vision and confidence appropriate to a major international player and an aspiring great power.■

B.G. Verghese is at the Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi.

China Policy in Tibet

Kishan S. Rana

BUDDHA'S WARRIORS
By Mikel Dunham
Penguin, New Delhi, 2004, pp. 433, Rs.450.00

One of the joys of books is that it is the reader who determines what s/he takes from an opus. The author is like a master-chef who lays out a banquet spread of his creation; the reader takes from the offering that which takes his fancy — and each reader is at least slightly different in perception and understanding. As with any of the arts, literature becomes an interplay between the originator of the *rasa* and the *rasik*; that process creates and closes the circle of interpersonal communication. Each encounter is unique.

These thoughts struck me as I read the graphic, powerful narrative that Mikel Dunham has assembled in *Buddha's Warriors*; his identification with the Tibetan cause is complete — it is for you and me, as readers to be convinced of the arguments that he has woven. There lies the rub, at least for me.

Dunham uses the device of letting his Tibetan and other actors, interviewed in the extensive research that he carried out, speak in the direct voice, presenting quotations from their accounts in large chunks of italicized text. That makes the book readable, almost as a first person narrative, but with selected, multiple voices. But the device also leads to its own failure, in that there is nothing that resembles objective presentation of the case (though the author presents an impressive bibliography). You must buy into a single storyline.

Dunham is at his best in evoking the atmosphere of old Tibet, and in the detailed accounts of the armed clashes and destruction by the Chinese rulers of new Tibet. But one must take his word that the account presented is the full picture of what actually happened; he cites very little of the Chinese perspective. Dunham presents a gripping account of the Tibetan resistance, and the character of the people of Kham, Amdo and Golok regions of Eastern Tibet who provided the backbone of resistance. He notes also the contempt that these fighters held for Lhasa politics within the entourage of the Dalai Lama and some of its personalities; Dunham juxtaposes this against the simple faith of these fiercely independent warriors. This is a romantic perspective; relying on the memory of the diaspora that the author interviews, besides the CIA handlers of the Tibetan fighters, means also that inconvenient events are air-brushed away; we only remember that which we wish, such memory does not produce historical accuracy.

The author is at his weakest in his simplistic essays into political analysis of the actions of other countries, notably the US, UK, and of course India. He is especially harsh in his estimation of Nehru and of India's motivation. He refers to the India-China boundary dispute, but fails to see the real connection between New Delhi's estimation of the Tibet issue and its profound concerns over the border; it is easy to speak of Nehru's errors in hindsight, but the complexity of Indian concerns are not even remotely understood by the author. For instance, writing of President Kennedy's reluctance to resume CIA air-supplies to rebels in Mustang in 1961 without India's backing (Eisenhower had suspended these when the Gary Powers U-2 aircraft was shot down on May 1, 1960), he writes of 'Nehru's sycophantic relationship with China' — this willfully ignores the real concerns that motivated New Delhi's prudence.

That China's policy in Tibet was a huge tragedy is not in question. Tibet's autonomy and quasi-independence, implicit in the British notion that it was under China's 'suzerainty', clashed headlong with the resurgence of Chinese nationalism following Mao's triumph over the KMT in 1949. The suzerainty concept represented what Sugata Bose has called 'layered sovereignty'— see *A Hundred Horizons* (2005), where an entity could acknowledge a superior authority and yet remain autonomous in its own territory. But such notions could not survive the assertiveness of new states, which viewed the extension of their authority to the very limits of their claimed borders as essential acts of statehood. The incorporation of Tibet into the Chinese body politic was ordained in the very fact of China's resurgence. This is what Nehru understood, because independent India had that same self-image of sovereign authority.

The Tibetan exiles who have made their home in India and in other parts of the world, cling to their own myths, and like all long-term exiles, over time they have developed their own vested interests; a return to Tibet through compromise with China is not germane any longer to most of them. Dunham observes that the places where Tibetan exiles live in India and Nepal 'bear an eerie resemblance to the dismal reservations allotted to Native Americans'. Dunham overlooks the conditions of much greater deprivation in which the citizens of these countries live, as neighbours to their Tibetan guests. A simple fact: the Tibetans in Dharamsala and elsewhere have now become fat-cats, thriving on the bountiful foreign aid bestowed on them, lording it over the local inhabitants.

Dunham casually picks up one of the myths of the kind that exiles often favour—that these Tibetan administrators are a 'government-in-exile'. No one recognizes such a government; it is an abuse of the shelter that India has given to the Dalai Lama and his entourage, and to the ordinary refugees, that the Tibetan hierarchy should cling to such a fiction.

Anyone looking for a balanced account of Tibet might consider Patrick French's *Tibet, Tibet: A Personal History of a Lost Land* (2004). Written by a former head of the Tibet Committee in the UK (very well disposed to the Tibetan cause, he quit the Committee after writing this book), it is based on a yearlong visit to Tibet; French comes to the conclusion that Tibet's future is bound with that of China, and that western activists, and the exiles, have perhaps even harmed the Tibetan people.

The Dalai Lama has observed, quoted by Dunham at the very end of his book, that the tragedy of Tibet has been a blessing in disguise; its religion has taken root all over the world. This is not a small achievement, when we consider the world's ignorance of Tibet in 1950, the time when Tibet was forced to move out of its isolation.■

Kishan S. Rana, a former diplomat, is the author of *The 21st Century Ambassador* (OUP, 2005).

Parametres and Benchmarks

Shri Prakash

INDIA AND CHINA IN THE COLONIAL WORLD
Edited by Madhavi Thampi
Social Science Press, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 256, Rs. 675.00

The book being reviewed is a collection of revised papers by well known China experts presented at an international seminar in New Delhi in November 2000. However, the issues taken up are of a long term historical interest and hence the various papers retain a freshness of insight as well as information and are well worth reading seriously. They provide important parameters and benchmarks for comparing the relations between India and China when they were both fighting in their own ways to liberate themselves from the yoke of colonial powers and in contemporary times when they are pursuing their own developmental strategies to become economically developed countries with modernized social systems. The central value of such a volume is the comparative analysis it can enable us to do of Sino-Indian relations at a time when peoples were fighting for national liberation and now when they are engaged in devising strategies to grapple with the processes of globalization in a beneficial and reciprocal manner. Madhavi Thampi endorses such a view in her Introduction.

This review does not propose to undertake a taxonomic survey chapter or theme wise. It rather first of all proposes to delineate the underlying issues of common concern and those which distinguish the Chinese from the Indian experience of colonialism.

One of the major points underlined by Asiya Siddiqi and Chen Zhilong who have analysed the triangular trade between India, China and Britain as well as the multilateral trade originating from Shanghai is that its cornerstone was the military rule and political control exercised by the colonial powers over India and China and not any commercial comparative advantage. As Asiya Siddiqi points out the Dutch perhaps were the first to resort to inter-Asian trade importing products from one eastern market to another in order to generate trading capital. They used to import textiles from India to Indonesia in order to buy their cargoes of spices by suing the profits derived from the price differential derived from buying cheap and selling dear (p. 23).

One of the major points underlined by Asiya Siddiqi and Chen Zhilong who have analysed the triangular trade between India, China and Britain as well as the multilateral trade originating from Shanghai is that its cornerstone was the military rule and political control exercised by the colonial powers over India and China and not any commercial comparative advantage.

The English East India Company followed a similar strategy to buy tea from China by selling opium procured in India forcefully as land revenue in kind or bought at monopoly prices by moneylenders who could be made to sell at low prices to the ruling power. Given the prevalence of drought and famines in some parts of China, opium provided addictive relief. The East India Company estimated that Chinese smokers of opium in 1820 numbered 365,000 in 1835 around two million and in the 1880s approximately 13.3 million daily (p.27). The opium appropriated by the British at extremely low prices in India was deemed to be in lieu of the tribute demanded by the Crown Government from its colony. When the Manchu Government tried to ban the opium trade the British forcefully captured Hong Kong. Textiles was soon added to the country trade between India and China conducted by private traders who paid customs dues to the East India Company Government. Parsis, Gujaratis, Britishers and even Americans made fortunes from this triangular trade. Price differentials were large and there being no competition, the trade was colonial in nature, unlike today when Indians and Chinese can independently fix the prices of their exports as well as decide on where to import from.

The colonial period it must be remembered added a new dimension to Sino-Indian relations by bringing Chinese immigrants to Calcutta and Indian immigrants to Shanghai. The Chinese, originally sailors, soon married Chinese women and settled in India as cooks and shoesmiths accounting today for the popularity in India of Chinese food and footwear. Indians who were recruited for service by the British as soldiers and policemen often joined the Taiping rebels fighting warlords and imperialists and were in the end remembered fondly by the Chinese. The most prominent flagbearer of the friendship between the two peoples was the medical mission led by
Dr. Kotnis appreciated by Mao Tse Tung and the visits by Rabindranath Tagore as well as Jawaharlal Nehru. Chiang Kai Shek too visited India during the days of the Second World War and the famous scholar Tan Yun Shan, father of Professor Tan Chung helped through his speeches and writings to create a proper appreciation of the devastation being caused by Japanese aggression in China. These issues are dealt with in the chapters by Madhavi Thampi, Ramakrishna Chatterjee, Huang Chih Lien and B.R. Deepak.

A new dimension of Chinese-Indian cooperation in the fight against colonialism and apartheid is analysed by Mira Sinha Bhattacharjea in her chapter on 'Gandhi and the Chinese Community in South Africa'. Indians and Chinese nonviolent resistance helped to restrict Boer racist oppression against "Asiatics". This created a sense of deep solidarity in Gandhi for the Chinese struggle against all colonialism. The knowledge about and experience of the National Liberation Movements in India and China laid the basis of an early creation of Panchsheel and the Nonaligned Movement. It is noteworthy that even Subhash Chandra Bose who as a matter of political strategy took Japanese help to build the *Azad Hind Fauj* (The Indian National Army) never approved of Japanese aggression in China. Through thick and thin and all twists and turns the political and cultural leaders of China and India successfully sought to create a common ground to advance their national interests in partnership with each other a perspective which remains valid today as emphasized by Surjit Man Singh. Conflicts over the border issue become a part of national consolidation, a leftover of colonial history which needs to be resolved amicably and peacefully by developing mutually objective perceptions of each other. By implying this message the volume serves a worthwhile contemporary cause and will help in furthering Sino-Indian cooperation.■

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Bilateral Relationships

Mira Sinha Bhattacharjea

CHINA INDIA ECONOMIC ENGAGEMENT: BUILDING MUTUAL CONFIDENCE
By Swaran Singh
CSH Occasional Paper No 10, 2005, Centre De Sciences Humaines
Raman Naahar, Rajdhani Art Press, New Delhi, pp. 205, price not stated.

The publication of this slim volume comes at a most appropriate moment of time when the eyes of the world are focused on the dynamic economic growth of India and China, and a Great Debate is underway on the burgeoning economic engagement between them and on their changing political strategic relationship. With it, the author has entered and hopes to influence this debate.

China, as is well known, preceded India on this path by a decade and more, embarking on its reform and modernization project as early as 1978. By the turn of the century, the dynamism of the Chinese economy and its high growth rate that averaged 10% per annum impressed the world. It was anticipated that China could well become the world's second largest economy by the year 2020. Some commentators even envisaged the new century as the Chinese century. India, however, was still not in the picture. As reforms of its constraining politico-economic system got underway, the questions that troubled most Indians were why India was not able to achieve what China had, how it could get to where China already was, and would China be willing to see India develop its innate potential. This last grew out of the negative image of China in the public mind and lingering suspicions that persisted because of the unresolved territorial and other issues. But the new tendency to admire the Chinese 'miracle' or model, is described by the author as an 'excessive focus' on China's successes and 'as an example to follow', that needs some correction.

This, however, points to the central issue in the Great Debate namely, is the bilateral India China relationship today commanded by politics or by economics? Or, in the author's words, is it moving from being 'suspicion driven' to one that is 'economy driven"? As far back as 1988 Deng Xiaoping mooted the idea of an Asian rather than a Chinese century to Rajiv Gandhi, and sought to dampen Indian fears by suggesting that economic cooperation could be mutually advantageous. Then, as India began to take necessary steps towards the reform of its cumbersome license raj, and as its growth rates climbed to 8% , this development was accompanied by a qualitative improvement in the strained relationship. The process was fast forwarded and put on a new track in 2003.

> ...is the bilateral India China relationship today commanded by politics or by economics? Or, in the author's words, is it moving from being 'suspicion driven' to one that is 'economy driven"?

Agreements reached during the visit of Prime Minister Vajpayee, were designed to release the log jam of almost four decades on the territorial issue and, by so doing to release the economic energies of both. The world—and of course China—began to take notice. Both countries were made aware, as the Chinese Premier observed to his Indian counterpart the following year, that a handshake between them would reverberate around the world : a remark that sparked the Great Debate on whether the two neighbours were fated to be natural competitors or partners in growth.

In this Occassional Paper written for the Centre de Science Humaines, Swaran Singh sets out to join and influence this debate by taking a closely argued position that economics and trade are and will continue to be the drivers of change in the India China political equation. According to him, the 47% rise in bilateral trade over that of 2002 to US $ 7bn in 2003/4, and to $9 bn the next year, accompanied by a parallel improvement of India's regional and international status, provides the proof if any was needed .That, indeed, is the burden of the volume under review as indicated by its very title : *China-India Economic Engagement: Building Mutual Confidence.* In short, it is the author's contention that an enlarging 'economic engagement' and, in particular, a revived border trade (which he considers to be a most effective CBM), will help build their mutual confidence. In turn, the author argues, this confidence has and will continue to encourage and enable the two neighbours to arrive at a final resolution of the boundary/border problem that has bedevilled their relationship since the very beginning of their simultaneous emergence into modern statehood. The argument is circular for it is expected that this, in turn, will further enlarge the economic engagement between them, and so on.

The position taken by Swaran Singh thus seeks to answer the basic question that is still being raised by many in India and abroad, as to whether India and China are fated to be 'natural competitors', by arguing that the compelling goal of modernized national development and the clear evidence of mutual advantage, should persuade them to substitute cooperation for competition though an element of competition will continue to exist. Swaran Singh belongs with those who argue for cooperation between these two giant economies, but even more with those who see that "economic engagement has since come to be *the most decisive influence in shaping their political perspectives"* (emphasis mine).

An Associate Professor at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, an avid researcher and prolific writer, Swaran Singh is to be commended for undertaking this important but gargantuan task. He fleshes out his position in 205 pages and six chapters, the title of each providing clear indication of its content. Thus, chapter 1 discusses the 'Opening Up' of the two economies to a globalizing world and takes account of the differences between the two processes, while chapter 2 traces their interaction through the centuries and their relative contributions to world economy, as well as their shared but different 'Historical Legacies'. The third and fourth chapters which discuss 'Bilateral Trade' and 'Border Trade' will be of particular interest to the reader who may well ask why the movement forward is so painfully slow and whether there is an obstructive nexus between reaching agreement on the alignment of the Line of Actual Control and the delay in opening the Nathula route and adding other points for border trade. In other words, the three year delay in implementing the promises of 2003 on border trade that were so directly linked to an understanding on an agreed boundary, seem to question Swaran Singh's basic argument on the role of trade, particularly border trade, as the driver of changing India China political perspectives on the territorial issue. Chapter 5 examines the many aspects of and what he terms the 'watersheds', in the process of 'Building Confidence' between these estranged neighbours within the wider context of the regional surround. The discussion on 'Future Trends' in the penultimate chapter seeks to tie up the argument that runs through the volume, to explain the slow growth of border trade and makes a plea for new thinking to overcome the residual scepticism 'that continues to affect India China economic ties.' The volume has impressive references and footnotes. It also has some interesting graphs on border trade routes, a useful bibliography and a chronology of bilateral agreements that surprisingly ends abruptly in 2002.■

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Stephen Cohen Festschrift

Rajesh Rajagopalan

SECURITY AND SOUTH ASIA: IDEAS, INSTITUTIONS AND INITIATIVES
Edited by Swarna Rajagopalan
Routledge, New Delhi, 2006, pp.263, Rs. 595.00

Stephen Philip Cohen, the American South Asianist, has produced a generation of students who are gradually becoming as prominent and well-recognized within the field as he is. There can be no greater tribute to his influence on South Asian studies than this. The volume under review is a well-deserved *festschrift* in his honour by his former students.

No volume such as this can expect to have consistency in themes or perspectives. This is no exception. On the positive side, the contributions are consistently good, though I do have disagreements with some of views, methods and arguments presented here. Not surprisingly, given Cohen's own interest on regional security issues, five of the eight substantive contributions deal with security matters, two on the Indian defence industry itself.

Rajagopalan's essay seeks to carry the debate about security beyond its dominant and narrow military focus by looking at how security was understood in traditional Indian thought, as exemplified in the *Ramayana*. Rajagopalan hints that Cohen might have disagreed with the thrust of her piece (p. 27), and I share Cohen's discomfort with such effort. Though the essay is well researched and written, there are some methodological issues here. Why the *Ramayana* should be privileged over other traditional Indian writings such as the *Mahabharta* or even *Arthasastra* is unclear. In addition, interpretive works such as this essay suffer from a more generic problem: there are many ways of interpreting such stories and traditions, and it is unclear what an appropriate way of judging between interpretations is. For example, the *Ramayana* could be interpreted as a classic Realist text: it is as much a story of conflict and power, of force and alliances, in which combat and death is endemic, as it is of ethical rules and moral conduct. It is also unclear why Rajagopalan has chosen to ignore other works on Indian strategic culture which seek to answer similar questions, such the well known essay by George Tanham and the responses to Tanham by Indian scholars.

Indian strategic culture is the subject of Kanti Bajpai's essay too. Bajpai attempts to categorize Indian strategic cultural views into three sets: the Nehruvians, the neoliberals and the hyperrealists. To illustrate the differences and some common points between these perspectives, he looks at how each of these perspectives view Pakistan and India-Pakistan relations. As he admits, such taxonomies are never perfect, and one can quibble with it. For example, the similarities between the Nehruvians and neoliberals are so great that it is unclear if anything is gained by having two distinct categories. Their primary difference is in terms of the importance of economic policies and interaction, but the neoliberal perspective can be seen as an evolution of the Nehruvian thought rather than something entirely distinct.

Indeed, it might have been more useful to split the hyper-realist category into a nationalist/conservative one and a realist one, because there are more significant differences between these two than between Nehruvians and neoliberals. Nationalists/conservatives are primarily interested in advancing the national interest and they see enemy states as the fundamental problem in strategic policy. For realists, power is important, but it is the distribution of power rather than enemy states that they would see as the primary problem in international power. For nationalist/conservatives, Pakistan and China (and maybe the US) are the problems that India faces; for realists, it is gross imbalance of power in South Asia and its consequence – Pakistan's natural fear of India – that is the problem.

Amit Gupta and Dinshaw Mistry argue in two separate essays that Indian defence industrial efforts are wayward and inefficient. This is a point that has been made before by other scholars, as well as by these two scholars themselves. Both have worked extensively on these issues, and Mistry is an acknowledged authority on the Indian space and missile programmes. Gupta argues that Indian defence industry and R&D efforts are still stuck in the 1950s groove, choosing to place its emphasis on long-term, prestige projects that might fatten the cv's of the scientists doing the project but do little good to Indian defence preparedness. Mistry focuses on some of these prestige projects, including India's unnecessary moonshot, to make the same point. It has always been a mystery why India needed to build indigenous assault rifles, anti-aircraft missiles, tanks and helicopters, (as opposed to strategic missiles and electronic measures and counter-measures) because there are eager sellers of most of these wares in the international market. Most of these projects suffer huge cost over-runs and time delays and in the end, require the infusion of foreign technology to get it off the ground. By way of recommendation, Gupta suggests a modest, rational programme that will be more useful while Mistry suggests international collaboration. There is much to recommend these analyses and conclusions, but I doubt if anybody in the political and bureaucratic leadership is listening.

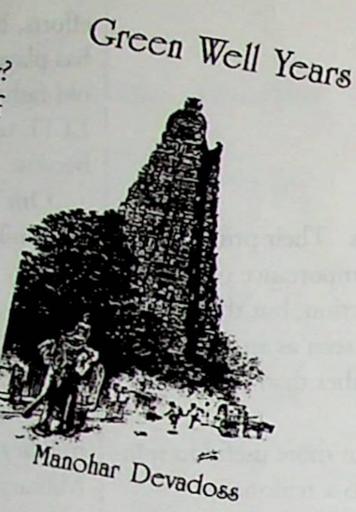
Kavita Khory looks at how the internet has been used to mobilize political action by diaspora communities, especially the Tamils and the Sikhs. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam has been far more successful than any other group in these efforts, but it is difficult to judge if the medium has played any critical role here, or whether it is old fashioned organizational skills that did. The LTTE terrorists have been successful precisely because they are well-organized.

One of the most innovative essays in the book by Sunil Dasgupta looks at the problem of military effectiveness and change. Though there is an increasing crop of civilians interested in and writing about military issues, most are still focussed on questions of weapons and strategy, and sometimes history. Thus issues that combine military studies and the social sciences are rare. Military effectiveness, an issue of great importance and long debate in western military studies, has not yet been undertaken in India. Dasgupta's work thus begins to fill an important gap; other scholars will also hopefully take up such issues for research. Dasgupta's argument, that the Indian army has been rather poor at doctrinal innovation, and his explanation for this, has considerable merit. He blames poor role definition, weak civilian leadership, and ineffective military leadership for this state of affairs.

In other essays, C.V. Raghavulu points to institutional failures in tackling natural disaster in India. Though the Indian performance has generally improved over the years, it is still lacking in many respects. He presents a summary of natural disasters including, earthquakes, floods and tsunamis, as well as other disasters such as famines and droughts. This is again another area where more scholarly attention is needed. Track 2 efforts, on the other hand, has seen a lot of work, though the effects of such efforts on peace building are uncertain. Chetan Kumar looks at these efforts, and unlike the other essays in this volume, he focuses not just on India or on the India-Pakistan conflict, but on Sri Lanka and Nepal too. This highlights one of the problems with this volume: all contributions are by scholars from India or of Indian origin, and the focus is thus more on India than on South Asia. This was clearly beyond the control of the editor, but is nevertheless odd in a volume which carries South Asia in its title.

There are also several very brief contributions about Stephen Cohen by Sumit Ganguly, Amit Gupta and Shonali Sardesai. There is a useful compendium of Steve Cohen's writings. But it would be a mistake to see Cohen's contributions entirely in terms of what he wrote or even in terms of the students whose PhD's he guided. He has had great influence on a large number of scholars working on South Asian issues, especially those working on security and international politics, including this author. This volume, as a small recognition of his contributions, is a welcome one.■

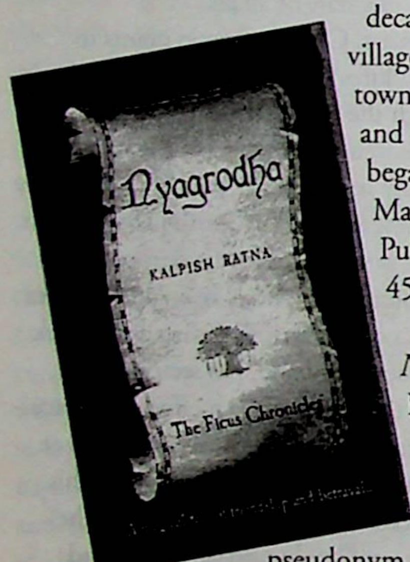
Rajesh Rajagopalan is Associate Professor in International Politics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.



And Where, My Friend, Lay You Hiding? by Ananda Mukherji is a quiet work of lyricism and insight of two friends and the path that their Muse leads them on.
HarperCollins, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 263, Rs. 295.00

Green Well Years by Manohar Devadoss, set in the temple city of Madurai in southern India around the middle of the twentieth century when the pressures of a changing world were beginning to impinge on traditional values, interweaves an evocative interpretation of the ethos of the city with the story of Sundar who is on the threshold of adolescence. The pen-and-ink drawings by the author capture the essence of Madurai.
East-West Books (Madras), Chennai, 2006, pp. 275, Rs. 195.00

The Suragi Tree by Prabhaker Acharya takes the reader through six decades as it traces a path from a small village in Karnataka to the large temple town of Udupi to the whirl of Mumbai, and then back again to where it all began.
Mapinlit, an Imprint of Mapin Publishing, Ahmedabad, 2006, pp. 452, price not stated.



Nyagrodha: The Ficus Chronicles by Kalpish Ratna is a magical tale of friendship and betrayal. Written by Ishret Syed and Kalpana Swaminathan together under the pseudonym which translates, in a meld of Persian and Sanskrit, as 'the pleasures of imagination', this is an 'upside-down story' about three runaway children—Lily, Vicky and Aman—led by Makhmal Khan the monkey into the shimmering world of the forest. Illustrations by Yamini Pandya.
Puffin Books, 2006, pp. 287, Rs. 375.00

Water: A Novel by Bapsi Sidhwa, based on the film by Deepa Mehta, examines the lives of widows in colonial India and is a haunting tale of love, faith and redemption.
Penguin/Viking, 2006, pp. 201, Rs. 325.00

The Grip of Change by P. Sivakami translated by the author from Tamil of Pazhaiyana Kazhithalum, the first Tamil novel by a Dalit woman. The sequel, Asiriyar Kurippu in which Sivakami visists her first work is also included.
Orient Longman, Hyderabad, 2006, pp. 207, Rs. 190.00

Dance Like A Man: A Stage Play in Two Acts by Mahesh Dattani is a study of human relationships and weaknesses framed by the age-old battle between tradition and youthful rebellion.
Penguin, 2006, pp. 74, Rs. 99.00

Twentieth Century Telugu Poetry compiled and translated by Syamala Kallury covers the important trends in Telugu poetry in the last century and brings the talent of the poets of this region to the national mainstream.
Shipra Publications, 2006, pp. 206, Rs. 395.00

Reporting the Partition of Punjab: Press, Public And Other Opinions by Raghuvendra Tanwar chronicles Punjab's partition by breaking free of tutored statements of 'so called facts' to provide new dimensions to crucial issues and events. Based mainly on 15 regional and national newspapers, the volume also includes hitherto unpublished sources like personal diaries, letters, memoirs and notes recorded by civil servants culled from centres in India and the United Kingdom.
Manohar Publishers, Delhi, 2006, pp. 622, Rs. 1195.00

Interrogating History: Essays for Hermann Kulke edited by Martin Brandtner and Shishir Kumar Panda incorporates essays which are thematically and spatially related to his areas of interests.
Manohar Publishers, Delhi, 2006, pp. 392, Rs. 875.00

17 Portrait of Bhutan: Treasures of the Thunder Dragon by Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck, Queen of Bhutan, is a captivating blend of personal memoir, history, folklore and travelogue woven into the larger story of Bhutan's rapid transition from a medieval kingdom to a modern nation within the space of a decade.
Penguin/Viking, Delhi, 2006, pp. 211, Rs. 495.00

Indian Buddhist Theories of Persons: Vasubandhu's "Refutation of the Theory of a Self" by James Duerlinger is a translation with an introduction and commentary with extensive explanations of the arguments for the theories of Buddhist philosophers which is the central target of Vasubandhu's refutation of the theory of a self.
RoutledgeCurzon, Indian Reprint 2005, pp. 308, Rs. 795.00

Assertive Religious Identities: India and Europe edited by Satish Saberwal and Mushirul Hasan, a volume of the proceedings of a seminar held in Jamia Millia Islamia in October 2003, addresses the working of major institutions, both Hindu and Muslim, whose ideologies and positions have been socially separative.
Manohar Publishers, Delhi, 2006, pp. 480, Rs. 995.00

Between God And The Sultan: A History of Islamic Law by Knut Vikor seeks to introduce the development and practice of Islamic law to students, lawyers and the growing number of readers interested in Islamic civilization.
Foundation Books, Delhi, 2005, pp. 387, Rs. 595.00

Cornelia Sorabji: India's Pioneer Woman Lawyer—A Biography by Suparna Gooptu uses rich and hitherto unused data to illustrate a remarkable individual who has remained neglected in studies on India's transition to modernity and also in the historiography of women and gender.
Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2006, pp. 241, Rs. 495.00

Gotama Buddha: A Biography by Kenneth J. Saunders combines

scholarly accuracy with admiration for the majestic character of Gotama.
Sundeep Prakashan, Delhi, 2005, pp. 113, Rs. 195.00

Code Name God: The Spiritual Odyssey of a Man of Science by Mani Bhaumik, one of the pioneers of the laser technology that made the corrective eye surgery LASIK possible, demonstrates how a perfect balance between spirituality and science can be achieved.
Penguin, Delhi, 2005, pp. 222, Rs. 150.00

What Would You Do To Save The World?: Confessions of a Could-Have-Been Beauty Queen by Ira Trivedi is an entertaining first novel which reveals the dust behind the diamonds, the tears behind the plastic smiles, and dishes out the dirt on what really goes on behind the scenes of a beauty pageant.
Penguin, Delhi, 2006, pp. 233, Rs. 195.00

The Backgroom Brigade: How a Few Intrepid Entrepreneurs Brought the World to India by Seetha, a Delhi-based economic journalist, tells the story of this entire phenomenon—how a group of people combining sophisticated technology with the improvisational skills of a street mechanic changed the way the world looked at India.
Penguin Portfolio, 2006, pp. 212, Rs. 375.00

Hindustani Music: A Tradition in Transition by Deepak Raja is a wide ranging survey of the North Indian tradition of classical music during the post-independence period. There is an introduction by Lyle Wachovsky and Foreword by Pt. Shiv Kumar Sharma.
D.K. Printworld, New Vistas in Indian Performing Arts No. 7, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 432, Rs. 490.00

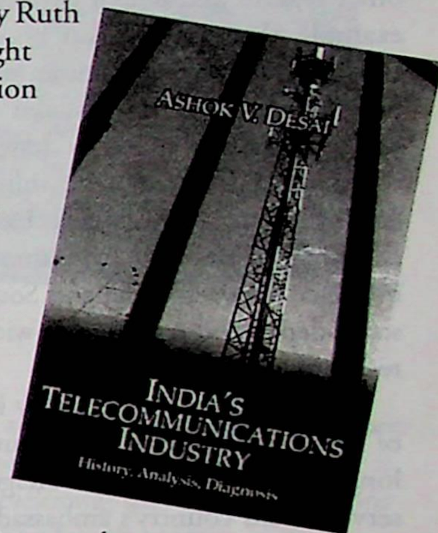
Hindi Film Song: Music Beyond Boundaries by Ashok Da. Ranade, analysing composers and voices, noting historical developments and discussing aesthetic issues, brings together all the strands to trace a complete musical profile of the distinctly Indian phenomenon that continues to cross all kinds of boundaries.
Promilla & Co., Publishers in association with Bibliophile South Asia, 2006, pp. 440, Rs. 495.00

Bombay Talkies by Mayank Shekhar with a foreword by Ashutosh Gowariker is a compilation of sharp and witty reviews which had appeared in Mid-Day and *Mumbai Mirror* chronicling Bollywood cinema during 2004 and 2005. This is the source book that any Bollywood buff will need to steer them through the tinsel world.
Frog Books, 2006, pp. 268, Rs. 295.00

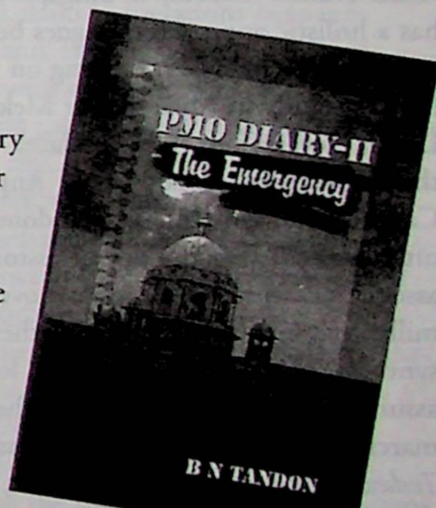
A Bowstring Winter by Dhruba Hazarika is a tale of revenge and violence set against the lush landscape of Shillong.
Penguin, 2006, pp. 343, Rs. 295.00

The Saga of Female Foeticide in India by Ashok K. Jain provides an insight into critical issues concerning female facticide and infanticide in India which will be useful for students, lawyers, academics and NGOs.
Socio Legal Offshoots, 2006, pp. 214, Rs. 545.00

Chocolate and Other Writings on Male-male Desire by Pandey Bechan Sharma 'Ugra', a collection of short stories published in 1927 and translated for the first time into English by Ruth Vanita raises issues as salient today as eight decades ago: the text and the role of fiction in society, and the morality of same-sex erotic relationships.
Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 103, Rs. 395.00



India's Telecommunications Industry: History, Analysis, Diagnosis by Ashok V. Desai is a pioneering study of the telecom sector by an eminent economist and examines why regulations do not work in India. The study highlights the conflict between the regulator and the government, the ways in which players in government and industry use red tape, political intrigue and the courts to achieve their ends.



PMO Diary II: The Emergency by B.N. Tandon who was a joint secretary in the Prime Minister's Secretariat for seven years, covers the period from August 16, 1975 to July 24, 1976, providing rich source material for the study of a period of crisis in the history of the nation. In the process, the reader gets, from the daily entries in the Diary, an accurate and fascinating glimpse into the persona of Indira Gandhi as well as her working style.
Konark Publishers, Delhi, 2006, pp. 452, Rs. 650.00

India-South East Asia Interface

K.P. Fabian

INDIA AND SOUTHEAST ASIA:TOWARDS SECURITY CONVERGENCE
By Sudhir Devare
ISEAS Publications, Singapore, 2006, pp.252, price not mentioned.

The author deals with the concept of security with much insight. If security can be described as "absence of fear", there is no element of fear between India and Southeast Asia. The two have no history of wars.

We seldom come across books dealing with Southeast Asia and India. There is a preoccupation with a few other regions and one or two countries. For example, there are so many books dealing with India's relations with Pakistan or the United States of America. Ambassador Sudhir Devare, pre-eminently qualified to draw our attention to this void in our strategic thinking and to contribute towards filling it, has rendered commendable service by examining the interface between India and Southeast Asia in some depth and coming out with serious recommendations for action.

Devare retired as Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs in 2001. During his 37-year long career in the Indian Foreign Service, he has served as his country's ambassador in Indonesia and South Korea. Currently, a Senior Visiting Research Fellow at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) in Singapore, the author has a holistic approach that goes beyond the headlines of the day. "Standing on the banks of the Irrawaddy in Myanmar or Mekong in Laos", Devare says in his preface, "or gazing at the stupendous human feat of Angkor Vat in Cambodia or Borobudur in Indonesia, I have often marvelled at the tide of history of India's association with Southeast Asia over the millennia, blending with each other in a synthesis of thoughts and values, lending assurance and strength to each other. The march of time has seen many vicissitudes. *Today, there are many circumstances. Their neglect will be only at the cost of mutual understanding and good neighbourliness. In a world of shrunken communications, the need for knowledge with respect to one another has never been greater."* (Italics added.) The italicized comment applies to the global situation with poignant accuracy as we see pursuit of policy bereft of the knowledge of history.

India and the states in Southeast Asia regained their freedom in the post-World War 11 period. The *Asian Relations Conference* held in New Delhi in March 1947, attended by high level participants from all corners of Asia, attested to "the strong sense of pan-Asianness of all participants." In 1949, India took the initiative to convene a special conference of eighteen nations to support Indonesia's freedom struggle. In the next decade and half, India's relations with Southeast Asian states such as Indonesia, Burma, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Malaysia were "intensive and covered all aspects, including political, security and economic." There was considerable input "from this interaction with Southeast Asia" in the formulation of India's foreign policy during its formative period. But, by the early 1960s, the level of interaction and engagement started to decline. The author explains the decline as owing primarily to the spread of the Cold War to Southeast Asia. The other reasons are the 1962 Chinese attack on India, the Pakistan-China nexus, and India's own domestic preoccupations. But, today after a "hiatus of nearly three decades" India and Southeast Asia are looking towards an "invigorated relationship." The book is about this relationship.

The author deals with the concept of security with much insight. If security can be described as "absence of fear", there is no element of fear between India and Southeast Asia. The two have no history of wars. In any case, by acceding to ASEAN's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in October 2003, India has reaffirmed ASEAN's territorial integrity and sovereignty and non-interference in ASEAN's internal affairs. Currently, ASEAN is discussing a proposal for an Asian Security Community (ASC). Any security community will remain ineffective unless it takes into account the "context or the likely impact of outside powers, especially immediate neighbours." The author rightly concludes that India can be an important factor contributing to the success of ASC.

Devare proposes a *cooperative security framework* for the Asia-Pacific Region. In the post-Cold War era, the threat of war between states has significantly diminished. There is need to focus on the security of the individual while considering national security. Globalization has in a sense expanded the concept of security. On the other hand, in some cases, "globalization has led to the aggravation of inequalities at global, regional or local levels and, as a result, may become a cause for insecurity, especially in economic and human terms." Such comments are indeed refreshing as seldom do our scholars see security in such a comprehensive fashion. The author quotes with endorsement a definition of comprehensive security advanced by the Council for Security and Cooperation in Asia Pacific (CSCAP): *Comprehensive security is the pursuit of sustainable security in all fields (personal, political, economic, social, cultural, military, environmental)in both the domestic and external spheres, essentially through cooperative means.*

The concept of cooperative security presupposes that the security of all states—big, medium or small—need to be addressed. The concept should reinforce and complement the ongoing progress in economic prosperity. In the post-Cold War era, the author points out, cooperative security implies "de-emphasizing" in three key areas: ideology, military spending arising from ideological, political or military threats; and superpower rivalry. The participating states should abide by the following principles:(1) all participants have to accept that peace is indivisible, and only through a framework of shared responsibility can cooperative security be promoted;(2) a desire to view security in comprehensive terms; and (3) a firm commitment to the principle of mutual and equal security ,which can be ensured by respect for the territorial integrity of all states, non-interference in internal affairs, and opposition to any attempts to subvert national integrity and sovereignty.

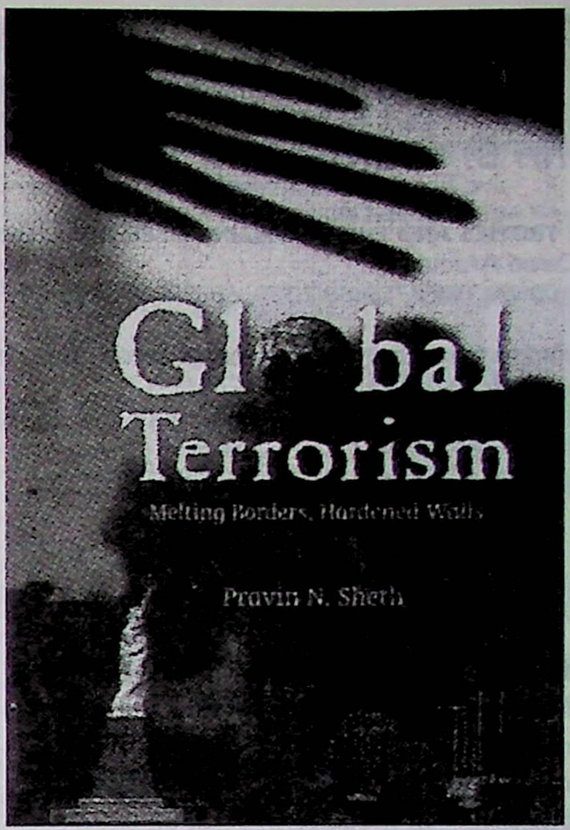
The core argument of the author is that it is in the interest of both India and Southeast Asia to accept cooperative security as the cornerstone of their relations. The argument is correct. But, it is also true that the choices that India and Southeast Asia make about their mutual relations are, to an extent, influenced by what the major external powers choose to do . For example, the relations between South Korea and North Korea are not entirely decided by the two of them. There are significant external inputs that the Koreas have to accept. The India-Southeast Asia relationship is not comparable to the intra-Korean one. But, the importance of external inputs cannot be underestimated. Given the size of the book we could not have expected the author to deal with this issue in any substantive manner though he does allude to it. But, in terms of the options that the two sides have, the author has given us a good in-depth analysis. This reviewer has no hesitation in recommending this book to scholars as well as to the general public. That New Delhi had to formulate and announce a "Look East" policy some time back speaks volumes about India's neglect of a region of considerable importance to her.■

K.P. Fabian is the author of *Commonsense on War on Iraq.*

Uncivilized Actions
Unholy Reactions

Pawan Sinha

GLOBAL TERRORISM: MELTING BORDERS, HARDENED WALLS
By Pravin N.Sheth
Rawat Publications,Delhi, 2005, pp. 384, Rs.795.00



It was in the late 80s and early 90s that acts of terror started drawing global attention. Incidents like bombing the World Trade Center in New York in 2001, the Aum Shinrikyo attack of the Tokyo subway in 1995, bombing the US embassies in Nairobi and Dar-es-Salam in 1998 brought forth the worldwide dimensions of postmodern terrorism. Emergence of the Al-Qaeda, the Hizbul Mujahiddeen, the Lashkar-e-Toiba, the Jaish-e-Mohammad and Hammas marked the beginning of global terrorism. These terrorist organizations are equipped with WMD, hi-tech systems, skilled activists, committed militias and international financial networking. The possession of nuclear weapons by these organizations cannot be denied firmly. Moreover they have deep roots in society, in ethnic communities and are backed by religious fervour, which they use to acquire finances and moral support from the diaspora. Their close proximity with some states too cannot be ruled out. Terrorist organizations like the Al-Qaeda have their own capability to generate financial resources through real estate business, manufacturing units of sweets, honey, leather, bakery etc., agro industries and export business. They also have NGO networks active throughout the world. Almost all terrorist groups are 'exporting' their militias in different parts of the world to 'help' warring states or local terrorist groups. Drug trafficking has become another important means of their earning. Thus at the moment the world is facing a highly structured terrorism whose profile is undetectable. In the name of religion they have mustered support among the masses the world over. Hence attacking one or the other nation cannot be a proper strategy to combat terrorism. Security forces, so far, have proved to be a temporary and short-lived solution to this problem. To combat postmodern global terrorism, it is necessary to study the root causes where it breeds from, for example functioning of the state system, prevailing international order, and globalization and causes of unrest in Muslim society.

...at the moment the world is facing a highly structured terrorism whose profile is undetectable. In the name of religion they have mustered support among the masses the world over.

Pravin N. Sheth is the author of fourteen books besides *Global Terrorism-Melting Borders, Hardened Walls* . His teaching and research experience at Pennsylvania, USA, Gujarat University, India and University of Hull, U.K. have given him a wide range of vision which enable him to deal with the issue.

Professor Sheth has dealt mainly with the ideo-political basis of terrorism and the events influencing the world since 9/11. He has treated terrorism as a dynamic movement, a complex phenomenon and as a global problem. The book also examines the magnitude of the challenge and the changed form of the Al-Qaeda. It also evaluates how the US, India and Pakistan have responded to challenges of terrorism. The author has discussed issues like fundamentalism and political Islam in detail in eight chapters and three annexures. The first chapter deals with the incidents on 9/11 and the reactions of people of USA and US Army afterwards. The second chapter provides readers with causes of anti-American Islamic rage, Islamic fundamentalism and churning of Muslim society. The author has touched upon the Arab-Israel-Palestine issue and has also given sociological perspective to analyse the causes of terrorism in Islamic society particularly in West Asia. The author has also mentioned the failed states in West Asia and lack of democratic aptitude of Islamic society there. No doubt this region produces the maximum of global terrorism but the causes are buried in the past. Muslims of this region believe that for oil US and UK have been after their politico-religious-economic sovereignty. In fact the US and the UK are reaping what they sowed in the 50s, 70s and 90s. Hence to bring international peace the US should be more humane and the heartland of Muslims world over should be free from external interference or uncivilized actions; otherwise unholy reactions will continue.

In the third chapter the author discusses the new dimensions of US foreign policy, Indian response and the role of Pakistan. Though, according to the author, Bush is becoming more practical in his foreign policy approach, Bush is still lagging in developing harmonious relations with West Asia. The fourth chapter investigates whether postmodern terrorism is a "clash of civilizations" or an outcome of unjust globalization. It also explains the relations between globalization and Talibanization. The fifth chapter deals with the challenges of reconstruction of terrorist and war torn areas like Afghanistan and Iraq and a new world. The sixth chapter is about terrorism in South Asia in general and India in particular. The same chapter discusses possible nuclear terrorism in the Indian subcontinent, flow of terrorism in Gujarat and the US obsession with Iraq. In the concluding chapter the author reviews 44 months post 9/11, the Al-Qaeda and the perspective of paradigms.

All through the reading of the book it seems that the author has kept a close and vigilant eye on the post 9/11 developments. He has narrated many incidents related to the event giving the reaction of all sections of US society. Bhiku Parekh, an eminent scholar and Member House of Lords who has written the Foreword to the book, has also commended the author for his knowledge of both Political Science and Sociology. But because most of the narrations and quotes do not have any references, footnotes or even end notes, their use for research is limited. Secondly, the author has taken up many issues at a time and therefore it has not been possible for him to do justice to all of them.■

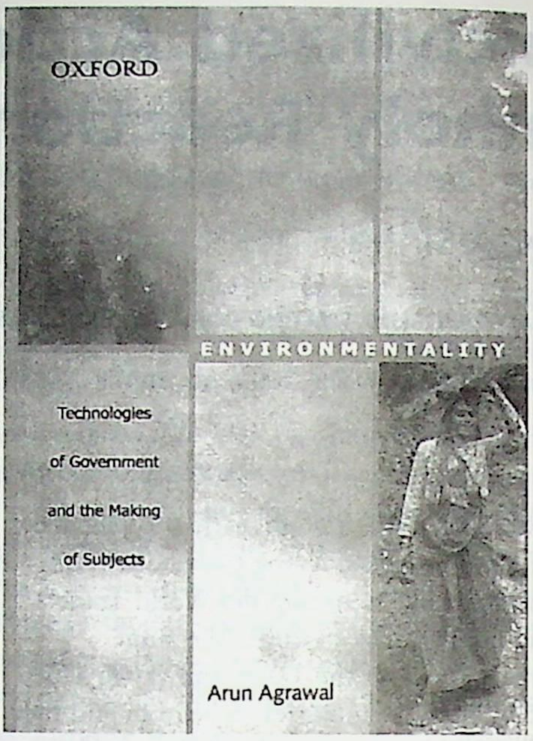
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Gaze and Governmentality

John B. Lourdusamy

THE TROPICS AND THE TRAVELLING GAZE: INDIA, LANDSCAPE, AND SCIENCE 1800 – 1856
By David Arnold
Permanent Black, Delhi, 2005, pp.298, Rs. 695.00

ENVIRONMENTALITY: TECHNOLOGIES OF GOVERNMENT AND THE MAKING OF SUBJECTS
By Arun Agrawal
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2005, pp.325, Rs. 650.00



When the two books reached this reviewer's desk, at first sight they seemed quite obviously related to each other as both dealt with nature/environment/forests and the colonial approaches to them (though the latter work extends beyond colonial rule) in broad terms. But on closer study each seemed to have a different orientation and to be dwelling on different sets of issues. Yet, on third thoughts, (and with the benefit of a finer look on the ultimate essences of both books) a combined evaluation seemed to be more fruitful.

Arnold's work is about how the Indian landscape was ideationally constructed by the gaze and narratives of naturalists, travellers and writers through devices that were alien and external to India and how this form of colonial knowledge production had a formative influence on the colonizing process itself in the first half of the 19th century.

Agrawal's work on the other hand starts with the second half of the century when the colonial state was getting more formalized, more institutionalized and more certain of the need for its forms of knowledge to order the space over which it presided as seen in its greater intrusion into the forests. Agrawal examines the violent reactions to this kind of intrusion in the Kumaon regions in the Himalayas and how they led to renegotiation of relationship between the colonial state and the local communities based on the ideals of partnership and decentralization.

The above summations may tempt one to surmise that the first work is more about ideas/imagination and the second more about practical politics. Not exactly so. Arnold lays it straight quite early on that the narratives and texts that are the subject of his study did not just produce an imagined rendition of the alien land in familiar or utopian terms. They very much informed and inspired many practical, scientific, technical and medical interventions. In fact they constituted the mental appropriation of the encountered land in terms that legitimated colonial rule itself.

In this extensively researched work, Arnold summons an array of sources, much of it non-governmental, drawing on the works, communications and accounts of naturalists, missionaries and travellers to buttress the point that this appropriation was as important as the armies, the expeditions and the administrative contrivances of the colonial state in its formative years. He explicates quite elaborately how the idea of India as a tropical land was itself a colonial conjuration based on external images or prior experiences and how the inability to fit the actually seen India into the pre-moulded image was in turn used as a justification for colonial intervention to make it more of the idealized—lush and luxuriant—and less the land of disease and death.

Herein Arnold highlights the influence of Romanticism. In fact, among other things, his work purports to throw more light on the relationship between travel, science and Romanticism. It does that to a good extent while also underlining the important role played by the associated idea of 'improvement' whereby the British felt an obligation to make things better. On the one hand, there was a glorification of the wild nature. On the other, there was the sense that much needed to be done by way of ordering and improving which in turn needed European care, knowledge systems and tools. The images of disease, deprivation and death were sites for moral interventions – sites where missionary visions too converged. Western science and technology were seen as very crucial instruments in fulfilling this ideal of improvement. These convictions also led to the professionalization of nature and environment through scientific fields like botany and medicine.

Arnold's argument backed by its rich and diverse source materials do convince one that nature and environment were to a great extent subjectively and socially constructed entities. These constructs were not just evaluations or appreciations but significant preludes for intervention and transformation.

One such very visible attempt at transformation in the second half of the century was the increased attention shown towards forests. Though this was spurred to a large extent by the appreciation of the economic importance of forests, the interventions, as Agarwal shows in his turn, were very much imbued by the urge to rationalize and to order. This was manifested in the creation of the forest department and more importantly in the deployment of the discipline of statistics to appropriate the space within more manageable and amenable parameters. Agrawal shares the view of subjective construction by arguing that the colonial image of forests too (just like the broader idea of tropical India) rendered through the new mediation of numbers were not just faithful representations of uncontested realities. These representations were to a great extent coloured by the many choices made as to what had to be counted, what aspects of them and how the results were to be presented. In the process, what they rendered was not just a set of numbers and tables but a whole assortment of associated values and notions about what constituted the environment and the legitimate ways of approaching and using them.

Agrawal's work which is again a very well researched one, involving extensive fieldwork backed by archival research on forest protection in forty villages of Kumaon, delineates how the desire to order the naked wild was manifested in the procedures and systems introduced by the colonial state for administering (surveying, classifying, demarcating, protecting, harvesting, marketing etc.) the forests. Participation in these procedures in turn changed the basis of knowledge for understanding and dealing with the forests.

This kind of intervention (which ultimately led to the creation of forest reserves by the colonial state during 1911–16), impinged upon the daily life and very basis of survival of the local communities. Therefore it evoked violent reactions (such as willful burning of vegetation) which led the colonial state to backtrack and

renegotiate the terms of its engagement with the local communities.

In Arnold's work too, there is reference to engagement but that is more at the epistemological level. There Arnold cautions against being carried away by characterizations of the colonial encounter (with India) as based on principles of mutual sharing, exchange and dialogue on equal footing. He asserts that in spite of drawing upon indigenous knowledge systems and idioms, colonial knowledge production was by and large unilateral, self-serving and it put other forms of knowledge at a lower pedestal. But one can safely say that Arnold's assertion does not decisively close the debate on this particular question though he makes a powerful case.

Going back to Kumaoan and the engagement of a different kind, the local communities in their incendiary protests literally burnt down a certain kind of engagement marked by unilateral demarcations and enforcements. This forced the colonial government to rethink those unilateral mechanisms. This, in a sense, (though Agrawal does not highlight it much) marks a setback to the broader colonial enterprise of rational ordering and governance thus challenging and undermining one of the important ideological underpinnings of colonial rule. But this was not a major and decisive setback as in the process of renegotiation the local communities were in the end convinced of the need for institutionalized attempts and the legitimacy of such attempts to protect the forests. The forest councils which emerged out of the renegotiation made the local communities into accomplices and partners in the management of forests. It is to capture this phenomenon that Agrawal creatively introduces the term 'environmentality' drawing upon the Foucauldian concept of governmentality.

Agrawal elaborates the idea of environmentality using three further concepts: the creation of governmentalized localities, the emergence of regulatory communities and the constitution of environmental subjects. The first signifies the decentralization of regulatory mechanisms. In the process the communities come to terms with the need for governmental mechanisms in their localities. But under the new arrangement, *they* occupy a crucial place and therefore need new regulatory procedures that would shape the equations and interactions among local residents and their representatives. The onset of these is referred to as the emergence of regulatory communities. But not everyone shared the same level of commitment to the new arrangements nor was everyone uniformly complying to new modes of enforcement. This variation is what informs the constitution of environmental subjects – people for whom the environment constitutes an important domain of thought and who think and act in particular ways with regard to the environment.

Herein Agrawal underlines the need to go beyond static categories based on caste, gender and wealth to comprehend environmental relationships. His micro-studies convince him that the relationships are determined more by the individual's social position and level of direct and indirect participation in these new decentralized mechanisms and their regulatory modes. This is an important shift in the environmental analytics which deserves closer reading and careful attention. Agarwal's work is also important from the point of view of the kind of engagement (the renegotiated relationship between the state and the local communities) it deals with and its relevance to identity formation. The renegotiation not only altered the state's perception of its subjects (from trespassers to partners) but also the community members' own perception of themselves (from victims to participants and from riot leaders to cheer leaders). The author also emphasizes that the forest councils in spite of their more systemized rules and records, did not become mini-images of the larger colonial state and its bureaucratic set up. Instead the new arrangements significantly drew upon existing forms of cooperation and joint action. Agrawal's work, with its optimistic message (about the greater efficacy of the participatory approaches to environmental governance) will also be a useful guide to current worldwide environmental movements.

Seen together, both these books, dealing with the natural world, stand as important articulations of colonialism as a cultural process involving imagination, appropriation and various forms of negotiation. (Incidentally, Arnold's work is published as part of the Nature, Culture, Conservation Series of Permanent Black). They both invite us to go beyond standard categories of analysis and appreciate the more subtle ways in which colonial power relationships were enmeshed in knowledge enterprises.

In their own ways, both explicate how colonialism attributed identities and values to the lands and people it encountered, how it sought legitimacy in the name of its new scientific disciplines and how it used these disciplines as instruments and agents in negotiating its own relationship to the same lands and people.

Finally, the great strength of these two works is that their conceptual enunciations and arguments stand on a solid empirical grounding. The authors have not yielded to any temptations for arm chair imaginations/ arguments (however much they might have realized through their own works the power of imagined constructs!)

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Theory and Praxis of Fundamentalism Unpacked

Sudha Pai

CONTESTING FUNDAMENTALISMS
Edited by Carol Schick, Jo Ann Jaffe, Ailsa M. Watkinson
Fernwood Publishing 2004, Aakar Books for South Asia, New Delhi, 2006, pp.175, Rs. 500.00

The volume under review is a product of the intense debate on fundamentalism generated by the events of 9/11 in the US. Written by a group of scholars from Canada, its aim is to analyse not only "Islamic fundamentalism" to which much attention has been devoted, but to go beyond and to explore the *meaning* of fundamentalism so as to give it theoretical precision; and second, to work towards a project for contesting the claims of fundamentalism. Interestingly each chapter reflects some personal experience and involvement on the part of the contributors—due to connections with fundamentalist communities—including for some a feeling of vulnerability, which makes the book more than an academic treatise. The editors argue that it has immediate value because of the dangers of increasing violence that fundamentalism poses of which the invasion of Iraq is a significant example and the potential of creating a fascist state as in Europe where an extreme right-wing movement was an essential part of the rise of fascism.

The term fundamentalism is derived from the US Protestant Evangelical movement that began in the late 1800s. Explained as a reaction to the disruptions brought about by the Civil War, post-war Reconstruction, massive non-British immigration and urbanization, it was a revitalization movement aimed to save America and restore the true religion. However, the editors have a much broader and multidimensional view of contemporary *fundamentalisms* which can be "used to describe particular types of national pride, cultural exclusion, xenophobia, economic theory and other systems characterized by strongly held beliefs, group formation, boundary development and prescriptive practices" (p. 2). But more important, what all 'fundamentalisms' have in common is a set of *hegemonic beliefs* that can oppress social groups in many areas of life. Hence, in the volume the concept is expanded beyond the usual frame of religious experience to include market neo-liberalism and hegemonic masculinity. The common denominator is that fundamentalism is the enemy of rational debate and intellectual enquiry. As the various studies in the volume show, depending on the specific context it can be liberatory or oppressive. It is only extreme versions of any ideology that give rise to fundamentalism; as long as thinking remains open to criticism, suggestion and scrutiny and relationships are open to negotiation and difference, fundamentalism—including Islamic fundamentalism—can be kept in abeyance. The editors identify themselves as standing on a feminist, anti-racist and anti-oppressive platform. While fundamentalism is prescriptive and not open to change, their views are open to correction and debate.

Against this theoretical background, ten essays are devoted to an examination of various kinds of fundamentalisms. The common understanding underlying the essays is that movements involved in a search for identities or which attempt to modernize or revitalize a society, can be liberatory or, if they become fundamentalist, oppressive. Joyce Green points out how emergence of ethno-nationalism in which the nation is conceptualized in idealized or socially pure terms can become an oppressive space for those groups who do not conform to the idea of the community put forward, a good example in the Canadian context being the First Nations People. The next three chapters explore the emergence of fundamentalism in three specific communities: the Red Indians, the Jews and the Muslims. The examples show how projects meant to bring a community into the modern world often fail and create fundamentalisms of various kinds. Verna St. Denis points out how among the Red Indians the strategy of cultural revitalization through aboriginal education has allowed them to restore their old cultural mores, language and ways of life giving them a positive sense of cultural identity. But cultural discourse has assumed a level of sacredness due to which other explanations of marginalization, alienation and oppression of aboriginal peoples are no longer given any room. Similarly Jackie Kuikman traces the process by which the Zionist national movement among the Jews in Israel created a variety of fundamentalist ideologies connected to religion and politics. Post-Zionists are now trying to break down the hegemonic Zionist rhetoric and trying to create new political and civic discourses rooted in the actual realities in Israel.

F. Volker Greifenhagen's essay unpacks Islamic fundamentalism and compares it with fundamentalisms in other traditions to show

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that it is not unique. Contemporary Islamic fundamentalism is a reaction to the failure of the westernizing project in the Arab States of the Middle East in the 1960s and 70s. The October war of 1973; the oil wealth of the Arabic States and the Iranian Revolution of 1978-79 renewed enthusiasm. But the Gulf War of 1991 between two Islamic states and state suppression of Islamic revivalism in Egypt, Iraq and Syria created a crisis. This has led to proliferation of fundamentalist movements all over the world. But Greifenhagen distinguishes between mainstream Muslim fundamentalism and a more radical extreme fringe variety supported by very few. He argues that dialogue and engagements and not blind confrontations are required particularly with the mainstream variety. In a similar vein Nayyar S. Javed examining the impact of fundamentalism on Muslim women calls for "sifting Islam out of fundamentalism" so as to bring back a more egalitarian version.

Two essays examine other forms of fundamentalism not related to religion. Murray Knuttila argues that hegemonic masculinity is based on the notion that male supremacy and domination is natural, inevitable, desirable, historically constant and therefore immune to challenge. As a result fundamentalist masculinity has become routinized, patterned or institutionalized providing men who occupy positions of power and wealth "patriarchical dividend" (p. 97). Jo Ann Jaffe locates the rise of American hyperpatriotism in the decline of the US as a capitalist world power and its attempt to use its military dominance to maintain its position. It can be viewed as a fundamental discourse that is based upon the twin religions of right-wing Protestantism and 'civil religion' that consist of symbols, rituals and ceremonies, which provide it legitimacy

and support the capitalist state. A notion of US exceptionalism has been nurtured which projects a messianic image together with an absolutist discourse to define what is truly "American" and the type of ideas and beliefs that can be counted as acceptable. Such a reading of fundamentalism identifies it with power and hierarchy and controlling not only social relations, but in this case, nations.

The last three articles explore fundamentalism in the private sphere: the market, private delivery services and schools, areas where increasingly due to neo-liberalism the hold of the state is loosening. In all these areas it is the free market ideology which creates a powerful religious-like movement that is advocated by Christian, conservative fundamentalists because it reaffirms private property rights and the model of the patriarchal family as the basis for security and welfare. Market fundamentalism is a mixture of religious orthodoxy and laissez faire free-market ideology preached by government, business schools and universities. As a movement it has been used to penetrate the developing world in the 1980s and 90s. Ailsa Watkinson points to the rise of religious organizations in the domain of private delivery systems in Canada, an intrusion that is planned and well funded. Carol Schick shows how the use of the Lord's Prayer in schools is an attempt to establish a particular identity and historical legacy of the Canadian nation – as Christian and white. The struggle in all cases is for a "public domain" based on liberal values of individual and collective rights that limits private property and wealth.

The value of the volume lies in its eclectic understanding of fundamentalism: as multi-dimensional, something not always connected with religion or Islam, not necessarily dangerous unless its hegemonic and oppressive characteristics become dominant. Written in a sensitive and perceptive style it draws our attention to the dangers of a ruling ideology becoming fundamental and therefore oppressive to social groups. It also points to the dangers of labelling and not understanding social movements that are seeking their own space. The volume is useful in understanding fundamentalism in parts of the world undergoing rapid modernization and social change such as the Middle East or South Asia. It underlines that with negotiation and debate fundamentalism, especially Islamic fundamentalism, can be resolved. However, the authors need to ponder whether the concept of fundamentalism can be theoretically stretched to include all forms of oppressive beliefs in society thereby losing much of its analytical usefulness.■

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A Plea for Cultural Pluralism and a Multinational State

T.N. Madan

CRISIS AND CONTENTION IN INDIAN SOCIETY
By T.K. Oommen
Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 244, Rs.320.00

Looking at India since Independence in 1947, we are confronted with a situation of multi-dimensional change involving the restructuring of its polity, economy, and socio-cultural organization. India seems always to be a country in the making. This is how things should be; it is proof of vigour and vitality. But the problem with such optimism is that it could be dangerously unmindful of internal stresses inherent in the processes of change. One could highlight the dangers by invoking the notions of 'contention' and 'crisis', but only in order to cope better with them. And this is what T.K. Oommen does in this book.

Professor Oommen is one of India's senior sociologists, well known nationally and internationally. After retiring from the Jawaharlal Nehru University, he has assumed responsibility as Chair of the Schumacher Centre (New Delhi) and Ford Foundation Chair at the Delhi Policy Group. Given his commitment to his vocation as a sociologist and his professional eminence, he is often invited to inaugurate conferences, deliver keynote addresses, speak at seminars, and contribute to books. Of the twelve chapters of this book, six are addresses and six seminar papers. They were written between 1997 and 2004, and half of them are published here for the first time. Oommen's writing is accessible to the general reader no less than to the specialist, and is largely free of jargon and quotations. This is welcome because he deals with issues of general concern.

Oommen's primary argument is that in a country with a long history marked by the movement of peoples, conquests and in recent times colonialism, and a vast and varied geography, cultural (religious, linguistic and lifestyle) pluralism is only to be expected. This pluralism is a rich heritage; any attempt to dilute or erase it will 'destroy the soul of India' (p. 222). The threat to pluralism comes from two sources, namely, first, the relatively recent (350 years old) European notion of the nation-state ('for each nation its own state') and the policy of national integration imposed from above that goes with it, and, secondly, from the ideology of cultural nationalism/monism. One wishes Oommen had also pointed out that modernity too is destructive of diversity. Moreover, he equates, as many others do, secularism with pluralism ('harmonious' and 'dignified' coexistence of communities). Such an equation, proclaimed in the slogan of *sarva dharma sambhava*, suppresses rather than removes doubts about the prevailing approaches to the building of a stable and tolerant society. Within this framework, however, Oommen rightly emphasizes the importance of a federal rather than unitary state, but federalism has been unfortunately subjected to erosion from the very beginning. In his judgement, the Indian state rests on a hierarchical structure of power distribution—village panchayat, zilla, region, state, and the Union. The states to be viable should be culturally compact and the Union should be a multi-nationality state. To stress his conceptual position, he calls India not India but the Union of Indian States (UIS).

With Oommen's broad thesis I am in agreement, although the name UIS seems a bit quaint. I also believe in the pluralist perspective and consider cultural monism poisonous. What I miss in the book is the working out of details; a reiteration of the basic position does not remove the lacuna. A set of essays has obvious limitations of scope; nonetheless the absence of concretization of policy options is a pity. Also missing is a discussion of the challenge of globalization that a thoroughly decentralized polity might find hard to cope with.

The book opens with an introduction which is more than an expanded list of contents. It is a well constructed essay that binds together the chapters to make a book out of them. Oommen begins by pointing out that the heritage of composite culture (unity in diversity) looked like cracking up in the closing years of the 20th century; hence the sense of 'crisis' emphasized in the title of the book. 'The issues', Oommen writes, 'are rural-urban *disparity*; the *deprivation* of tribes, low castes and minority religious communities; *denial* of linguistic identity to subaltern communities; *domination* of the state over market and civil society; and the gradual *disintegration* of the joint family' (p. 15). This paragraph lists the themes that are one by one, and sometimes over and over again, dealt with in the book. His approach to the framing of policy responses to the issues is one of contention management in the liberal mode. Thus the first chapter concludes with the pronouncement

that 'the most crucial task' that India faces today is the 'working out' of 'equipoise between individual freedom and group solidarity' (p. 55). A prerequisite for this is the preservation of democracy and pluralism (chapter 2). In this regard, educational policies are a key instrument deserving close attention (chapter 3).

Chapters 4 and 5 are devoted to a discussion of the contending and contentious demands of language, caste and religion. The state, in the author's judgement 'wants to homogenize' and the people ('nations') want to 'celebrate diversity and nurture pluralism' (p. 105). The situation points to the inevitability of the multinationality state (the Soviet model is recalled) and the acknowledgement of multiculturalism and multiple identities. Currently, the biggest threat to these objectives is the Hindu-Hindi hegemony. In this connection, Oommen discusses the horrendous events in Gujarat in the early 1990s and the mischievous call for the Indianization of the Christian churches (chapter 6). In a rather daring spin on the argument for multiculturalism, he advocates the breaking up of large multilingual states (like UP) to carry forward the process of reorganization of state boundaries that began in the 1950s. He does not go into the economic costs and administrative viability of small states, nor does he examine the possibility that no matter how far you go (unless you go to the village level), there will always be encysted speech groups. He is apprehensive that unless the identity concerns of local communities are addressed the country could face internal security threats (chapter 8).

The separatist movements in Kashmir and the North-East are discussed in chapter 9 and 10 respectively. His advocacy of autonomy on the basis of 'Kashmiriat' (it should be Kashmiriyat), i.e. ethnic identity, as the middle ground between total integration and *azadi* is too broad to yield practical guidelines for action. Would recognition of Kashmiriyat entail acknowledgement of 'Dogriyat' and 'Ladhakiyat'? How are the competing aspirations to be reconciled? How does one mediate between the National Conference's autonomy resolution and the People's Democratic Party's demand for self-rule? In either case, how are financial deficits of the state to be met if not through grants, advances, etc. from New Delhi? And how can this route be taken without extending the authority of the Auditor and Comptroller General to J&K? What about PoK? And so on. In the North-East, different problems characterize even the three Christian majority states of Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya, calling for different policy mixes.

The last two chapters of the book (11 and 12) look to the future and reiterate the author's basic position: 'India cannot become a nation-state because the people do not share a *common* linguistic, religious and symbolic identity in it . . . . India's destiny is to remain national, federal and multi-cultural' (p. 222). Oommen spells out problems, points to broad policy perspectives, and stimulates debate and controversy. By doing so he contributes significantly to the promotion of interest in and discussion of major issues of national concern. This is commendable.

When the book is reprinted it should have an index and the statistical tables should be thoroughly checked: I have detected some errors; e.g. the population of Arunachal Pradesh in 1991 was not 864 million. It would also add to the usefulness of the bibliography if some more works by Indian scholars are added to it.■

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The Picture is the Story

Uma Chakravarti

VISUALISING INDIAN WOMEN: 1875-1947
Edited by Malavika Karlekar
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006, pp.121+xxx, Rs. 1500.00

Archiving of photographs, as well as the importance of the photo archive in the writing of social history has had a late start in India. For feminist scholars of history, the difficulties of finding sources that will enable them to reconstruct aspects of history in a gender sensitive rewriting of the past have been acute, as surviving sources have marginalized women. Since the written archive, especially as officially compiled, has been so obsessed with the powerful among the men—of what they did, as individuals, or as constituting institutions and structures that organized the workings of power, feminist scholars have tried to put together an alternative archive and this has been an exciting and fascinating process of recovery. However, in the main, this venture has been concentrated on putting together the *written* archive. Fortunately for us the sensitivity to women's history has also led to redefining what an archive could contain and how the fragments of women's lives can work themselves into telling a story based on what women have kept in their tin trunks—scraps of paper, letters, hand written notes, diaries, account books, newspaper cuttings, laboriously copied verses of poetry or film songs and of course the deeply cherished photographs. The history that can be written on the basis of these fragments has been marvellously demonstrated in a recent work[1], and the importance of archiving such fragments has led to the effort C.S. Lakshmi has put in to create SPARROW as an archive in Mumbai.

Nevertheless, feminist archiving is yet to gain the momentum that it deserves and therefore the creation of a visual archive to support and embellish the written archive is of critical importance. *Visualising Indian Women* brings the *visual* archive into focus and provides us with a series of photographs that tell their own stories, both as individual pictures and as a collective opening up of the past to us, as graphic images of their times. Many of these, and other photographs, act as a natural corollary to the biographies and autobiographies that feminist scholars have produced in the last decade or so; consequently all of us have experienced the excitement of opening a book and going straight to the pictures to get a feel of the dramatis personae who are going to emerge in the written word. On my part I have held on to the pleasure of seeing the irascible young face of princess Abida Sultan of Bhopal and the delightful pictures of a 5 year old on horseback, learning the piano but most poignant of all the 5 year old child bride from Peshawar who came to wed the future Nawab of Bhopal—and had to stand on a table to take her place among the adults who flanked her, as much as accounts of child brides travelling long distance to make their home in distant lands or the dramatic manner in which Abida retrieved control over her son after a broken marriage in a book that I read recently[2].

Many of us have also experienced the terrible disappointment of first searching, and then finding, from all sorts of places, photographs that have been gathering dust and passing them on to publishers and then finding that many of them cannot be carried because pages for the photographs are special, that they have to go in fixed units and so some will have to be left out, or it is too expensive to do all and so we have to choose—choose to almost cut out parts of oneself; the agony of putting some in and leaving others out almost neutralizes the pleasure of seeing the book finally come out. Here for a change the pictures can be assembled and tell their story without such constraints. The pictures are the main story and the written words are only the embellishment to situate them. So you turn page after page and *see* the past in vignettes—conjugality, family, schooling, rituals, work, captured as frozen moments of time.

In a fundamental way the camera and the photographs it created captures the history of the presentation of the self and especially in photographs treasured by women and archived by them, of the self in the family. In *Visualising Indian Women* these pictures—of new conjugalities, new notions of family and norms of domesticity dominate over other fields, even as the volume also captures the arenas that are opening up for women such as the school. In contrast there are few pictures of workplaces—the few that are there are in part a consequence of the fantastic use of the camera image by Pandita Ramabai who, more than any other woman of her time, understood the power of visual documentation and created for us the photographic archive of the transformed lives of her 'girls' now working at farming, the printing press, weaving and bible teaching (pp.110-113); these were an attempt to use images to enter and shape the public world and so are a stunning contrast to the dominant images of conjugality of her time. We can see then the different ways in which the camera came to construct, like the written word, the dominant ways of constructing women even through a new medium which allowed women to be represented—indeed needed to have them in the frame, and therefore could not erase them as the written word often did.

Given the importance of the photograph in constructions of the self it is not surprising that the studio owners cum photographers were a critical component in the fixing of images as they borrowed heavily from the parallel world of theatre in the creation of images. The editors point out that the studio owner was like a small time, episodic, theatre director who created pictures in a studio, using the studio as a fantasy space where imaginations and desires were played out in a collaborative moment by the photographer and the subjects of the pictures. Selected props such as carved chairs, high stools, exotic indoor plants, and pillars, were all introduced but especially significant were the fantasmic painted backdrops for the studio-photographs which was borrowed from the theatre with their paintings of pillars, palace walls, and oriental gardens to create new locations for a new class of people to situate themselves in; this was a parallel move that accompanied their engagement with the theatre which had opened up worlds to them but in which they were mere viewers. Here, in the studio images that were created the theatre viewers found an opportunity to be the protagonists in the unfolding drama of new social processes and in which they were active agents. Through all of this the photographs recorded visually, first for the subjects of the photographs and their families, and then for posterity, the modernity of their beings and the conscious adoption of changed lifestyles. So, as part of the process of abstracting the conjugal unit from the wider kin of the undivided family—mirroring the process described by women in their autobiographies— the home was the space for reform in which progressive husbands constructed, shaped and moulded their young wives and also recorded the process in the form of the conjugal photograph of the late 19th and early 20th centuries which itself was the ancestor of the marriage photograph—and now the marriage video, without which no marriage is complete anymore. Photographs taken during these decades mark the importance of dress and deportment, the careful and controlled lines of the body under appropriate garments, the very stiffness suggesting the tensions inherent in displaying what are otherwise regarded as carefully guarded 'possessions' whose pleasure is for personal consumption.

Looking at some of these photographs one is reminded of the controversy—also around a photograph taken in America where Anandibai Joshi wore the sari in its 'hindustani' form, and

not the conventional Maharashtrian style that she normally wore, which had generated a critical comment from her husband who was the recipient of the photograph. Anandibai had spiritedly defended herself by writing back that she had, in her own view, done no wrong as, after all, she was wearing the dress of her own countrywomen, not western dress. Very striking are the frozen, locked, constructed images of conjugality on display—as the picture of the Maharaja of Tripura who sits with his wife draping her arms round himself as he operates the lever of the camera to ensure that this 'private' act is not seen by any other man (p.4), or Kaval and Khushwant Singh artfully displaying their less inhibited closeness (p.11); these images are delightfully ruptured by the photograph of the writer Rashid Jehan, wearing men's clothes, with her arm round her husband in gay abandon making for a spontaneous picture that captures their shared camaraderie (p. 9).

There are many memorable pictures in this book which capture aspects of social life—such as 'the learning experience,' 'worlds beyond' 'the national movement' and so on that the editors have thematically arranged and annotated for us but there are many random elements that refuse to be put into any fixed themes: these are my personal favourites for no real reason except that they appeal to me: the two Indian 'Venuses', one of a young woman from a studio in Calcutta, lying on a tiger skin with a bunch of flowers in her hand as she modestly looks away from the camera with eyes downcast, and the other of an adolescent/child Feroze Begum, a young bejewelled 'nautch' girl from Hyderabad who smiles pertly as she lolls on a resplendent couch from the famous Raja Deendayal collection (p.72); the artful and constructed picture of an advertisement for a cooking stove (or perhaps it is the famous steam cooker that preceded the pressure cooker) where one woman displays a cooker while five other well dressed women arranged in a pyramidal formation seemingly absorb the virtues of the product; of the inadvertent poignancy of the picture below it of the stark kitchen of a Maharashtrian widow seated all by herself in a space to which, as a shaven headed and polluting woman, she was condemned; the spontaneity of the outdoor picture of young Koli girls laughing into the camera in contrast to the carefully groomed studio picture of a child both on p.16; the little girl who stands with an open umbrella holding a child sized doll in her arms as her mother Kaveri poses at playing the violin, from Coorg (p.15); royal kids who simulate palace rituals by creating a durbar like hierarchy—internalizing values for future use (p.37); the delightful picture of well dressed 'lady' students at the Lady Alexandra School in Bombay who look on a globe in the geography class titled 'girls look on the world' (p.44); the ubiquitous fancy dress picture that we all have in our own personal collections on p. 35 which enacts the unity in diversity through the different costumes of women—reminding us also that men are rarely captured in 'fancy' dress and are not required to demonstrate the unity in diversity theme; and finally the wonderful pictures of the need at all times to maintain hierarchies—even for the fleeting moments captured by the camera—the little girl who accompanied her royal child mistress to a wedding and sat separately and below everyone else for the photograph on p. 30; clearly photographs help us to explore the history of exclusions white or 'native' as we see in an evocative but routine picture from the royal albums of Bhopal where a row of English ladies sit demurely in the front row of the picture and an English maid stands at a respectful distance even as there is an unoccupied chair fairly close to her at the end of the row of ladies in the *Memoirs of a Rebel Princess* by Abida Sultan.

This book is a wonderful journey into the past; as an exhibition it needs to travel widely and as a curating venture it needs to be carried forward as the photograph and the studio has become more popular and available to a wider and humbler class of people; you can now be the 'gaon ki gori' or the 'Kashmir ki kali' right on the roadside through the donning of garments on hire; you can even have yourself photographed between Gandhiji and Nehru, or with your arm around Elizabeth Taylor as my prankster brother did in the 60s by ingenuous use of cut outs in roadside studios in Chandni Chowk! The possibilities this book opens up are numerous, looking at the pictures and reading its texts is something of a relief given that scholarship on the past can often be heavy. So readers here can go into a happy viewing mode and enjoy themselves—momentarily, at least.■

Reference

[1] Mythily Sivaraman, *Fragments of a Life: A Family Archive*, Delhi, Zubaan, 2006. See review in *The Book Review*, Vol. XXX, No. 6, p. 31, June 2006.

[2] Abida Sultan, *Memoirs of a Rebel Princess*, Karachi, Oxford University Press, 2004. See review in *The Book Review*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 5-6, p. 37, May-June 2004.

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Books-in-Brief **Books-in-Brief** **Books-in-Brief** **Books-in-Brief** **Books-in-Brief**

THE MEANING OF TINGO AND OTHER EXTRAORDINARY WORDS FROM AROUND THE WORLD
By Adam Jacot de Boinod
Penguin / Viking, 2005, pp. 210, £7.00

My sons used to collect funny names at one time. They used to go into splits of laughter at the thought of introducing oneself as 'I am Ramsbottom' or 'I am Churchgate'. Why would anyone want to call themselves Ramsbottom or Churchgate is difficult to divine. But names do have sociological or historical reasoning. In South India parents who have lost several of their offspring in child mortality make a resolution to call their child 'Kuppe' (rubbish) or Menasinkai (Chilli) if the child survives to propitiate the gods.

Many words and phrases the world over have connotations and meanings which makes for fascinating hours of pleasurable research. And that is what Adam Jacot de Boinod's forte is. His passionate affair with words began when he picked up an Albanian dictionary and found that there were as many as twenty-seven words for eyebrows and just as many for mustaches. And so he went on to discover that there is a protocol for sneezing. A single word can convey a whole gamut of meaning—*smertensleje* (Danish) to toss and turn on your bed in pain; *miryachit* (Russian) a disease in which the sufferer mimics everything that is said or done by another; *lele* (Hawaian) a tall wild banana placed near the altar, offered to the gods and also used for love magic.



Looking for some Hi-tech words? Here are some. *Tamagotchi* (Japanese) a loveable egg (an electronic device which copies the demands for food or attention of a pet), *xiaoxia* (Chinese) small lobsters (new internet users), *khali khukweni* (Zulu) a mobile phone (literally to, make a noise in the pocket).

Intriguing riddles, evocative names with specific meanings, words which are a mouthful, descriptive phrases for observations on nature, meteorological metaphors, vowelless words, workplace attitudes, whatever your particular inclination you can find the expression.

A must travel and bedtime companion.

UI

Women's Empowerment— The Changing Scenario

Ravinder Kaur

THE CHANGING STATUS OF WOMEN IN WEST BENGAL, 1970-2000: THE CHALLENGE AHEAD
Edited by Jasodhara Bagchi. Coordinating Editor: Sarmishtha Dutta Gupta
Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2005, pp.276, Rs. 560.00

This report on the changing status of women in West Bengal covering a period of thirty years from 1970-2000 is a very commendable effort and worth duplicating for other states. The report has the usual canvas assessing women's development indicators and the gender gap in health, nutrition, education, economic empowerment, political participation but with additional explorations into law and violence and women's production of cultural capital. There is a separate chapter on the status of tribal women given West Bengal's substantial tribal population.

The report consists of several detailed chapters addressing each development indicator, showing internal variations in the districts as well as evaluating West Bengal's status in relation to all-India statistics and pointing out meaningful comparisons with other states (for instance, it ruefully remarks how Haryana has overtaken West Bengal in girls/100 boys gross enrolment ratio; p.55). An especially valuable feature of the report is the set of appendices detailing the micro studies carried out. I found Appendix G, "A report on findings from a study of women's status in Birbhum District of West Bengal" by Atis Dasgupta and Suraj Bandyopadhyay very thorough in its approach, yielding insightful findings. Quantitative data for the entire report is also appended to enable comparability with statistical indicators from other parts of the country.

The report easily acknowledges that 'the status of women cannot be conceived as a monolith and static", hence, special effort has been devoted to mapping intra-state variations so that these can be addressed by appropriate policy. On a few indicators the state does better than the rest of India, on most others, the parameters are well-below other Indian states, including showing a decline from its own past performance. As an example, life expectancy at birth of women has outstripped that of men, the gain being larger than that in the rest of the country. However, this has implications for the especially dire straits in which older and especially widowed women find themselves. As the report points out, in a society that continues to remain largely patriarchal, such women have to be targeted for special policy interventions.

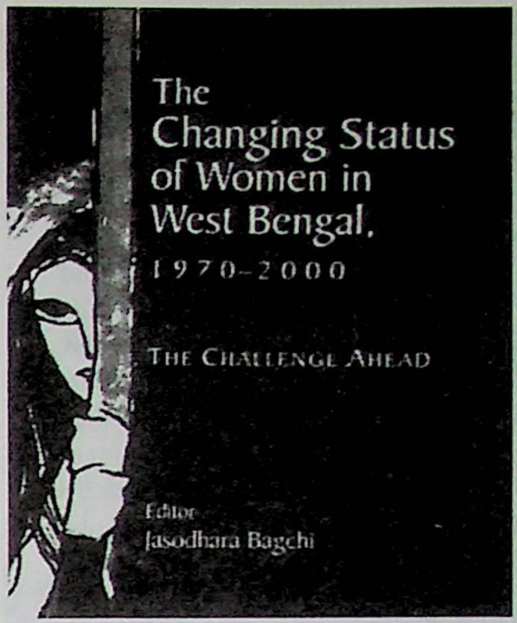
West Bengal has consistently had lower levels of infant and child mortality than the national averages; however, this is characterized by a gender gap, especially in the urban areas. Thus, while more children survive on the whole, a lesser number of girls survive, indicating a gender bias. More girls remain undernourished than boys, the gap increasing in 1998-99 and remaining higher than the all-India average. Immunization of girl children, however, has better coverage in West Bengal than in most other states.

Gender gap in literacy remains, although it had decreased by 2001. Bengal's higher rates of literacy for females stand to increase the participation of women in the labour market as the latter increasingly favours those with some education. This is also substantiated by changing urbanization rates for women who are now migrating for work and not simply for marriage. Higher literacy and labour participation would have further consequences for fertility over which women in West Bengal appear to have better control than elsewhere in India, despite some concerns about the age at marriage of rural women remaining lower.

There are some interesting insights into education: the poor quality of education is attributed to the disinterest and gross negligence by teachers to whom the state has assured high salaries. The report argues that it is the new salaries that reinforce the social distance between teachers and taught, making the former ignore poor students. Yet, it could equally be argued that it is life time employment and the 'assured' salary to the teacher that makes him/her unaccountable. With almost the entire budget being devoted to salaries, there is little left even for the mid-day meal, for school books and dresses let alone any horizontal expansion of education.

A peculiar fact that emerges from the survey of enrolment in rural areas (pp.56-57) is that despite lower enrolment for girls, education is considered less 'useful' for boys than for girls. This could well have to do with education and employment linkages being negatively correlated and a positive correlation between women's education and the upbringing of children. Contributors Bagchi and Guha also remark that in urban areas more money is spent on girl's middle level schooling than on boys but it reverses again at the secondary and higher level. They speculate that it could be due to the switch towards dowry accumulation. Much evidence, even from the rest of India, reveals that girls' education is viewed with the goal of marriage in mind while boys' education is much more likely to be seen in terms of employability, economic independence and eventual support of parents.

In the report on Birbhaum, the authors (Dasgupta and Bandyopadhyay) show that



discontinuities in education are the result of multiple factors (not merely culturally defined roles and expectations) but evidence from their analysis of family decisions about children's future shows that boys' education and future continue to be prioritized in upper caste and class families (in families of SC/ST and Muslims this is not found to be a central topic of discussion) and that the gender gap in relation to this increases with the formal education of the mother. In the nineties, however, this trend appears to be moving towards an equal emphasis on education for both girls and boys yet the desired level for the boys remains higher.

These trends needed a more nuanced analysis; besides gender bias, the expansion of employment opportunities for females relative to males creates an insecure environment for the latter and needs to be considered as an explanatory variable. Females displaced from agriculture are being rapidly absorbed into manufacturing – in West Bengal the rate of absorption has been 84 per cent compared to 10 percent in the country (p.79). The insecurity of the male, demand for whom is less, and from whom parents continue to have expectations of support and financial stability, enhances comparative investment in his education to enable him to succeed at all costs. Simultaneously educational investment in girls may decline or suffer as she is seen as not contributing to the parental household. This nexus of pressures and their perception by parents, especially in urban areas can also plausibly be linked to declining urban child sex ratios. Issues of masculinity appear to enhance hypergamy, necessitating dowry, further complicating the picture (p.118).

Political participation rates of women in West Bengal in rural areas are lower than the national average. The report admits that the Left parties have continued to have a patriarchal bias which inhibits women from wider political participation; domestic responsibilities too stand in the way. Loyalty to the party and political imperatives often take precedence over the need to fight gender biases within and outside the party.

The survey of cultural production and media shows that much remains to be done to encour-

age and showcase women's creative talents. Electronic media continues to reinforce stereotypes in its representation of women – with the modern, working woman being represented as evil and selfish; the new focus, however, is on woman's role as wife and lover in contrast to the earlier emphasis on the mother role. School textbooks continue to show a gender bias and women continue to be encouraged to pursue the arts as a hobby and not as a profession. Although the survey admittedly has its limitations, it is an interesting tool to assess women's participation in the large and important area of cultural production. This area needs to be used more effectively to document and represent changes occurring in women's lives (for instance women's support of parents and financial contribution to their own households), and dilemmas in the path of their empowerment.

Grouping the districts into four zones and with a fifth zone for Muslim respondents, a chapter assesses the impact of legal reforms on women. It highlights the disturbing rise in dowry deaths and violence within the home; some of the rise can be attributed to increased awareness and reporting, indicating an increase in awareness and rights. There is cause for believing, according to the authors, that the legal status of women is changing for the better. There are positive trends in the area of decision making and sharing of household work, also women looking after parents or in-laws with financial and other kinds of assistance. Yet, gaps remain, especially in the area of wages and land rights.

The problems of women of marginalized sections such as tribals, SCs and Muslims are addressed in a chapter on tribal women and in two appendices. In tribal areas, change from bride price to dowry has led to deterioration in the status of women and witch hunting is a serious problem. The heartrending story of Chuni Kotal, the first woman from a primitive tribe to have passed the higher secondary examination shows the considerable obstacles in the path of tribals who dare to dream beyond their own society. They get alienated from their own society and run the risk of oppression by powerful people outside. SC women receiving teacher training stressed the lack of information on social opportunities provided by the state. Despite this, SC communities have made substantial progress since the eighties and the rate of progress is quite high (p.165). In an interesting response, the trainees, while favouring the reservation policy felt that promotion should be through selection and that in certain specialized professions like medicine, law, research, engineering etc. the principle of recruitment should be merit (p.164). In a survey of three Muslim villages, most women wanted their children and especially their daughters to get some education (p.170). The report on Birbhaum district emphasizes that women of disadvantaged categories suffer lack of access to health facilities and also discriminatory treatment at the hands of state health service professionals.

Before reading the report one would expect that the overall scenario of women's progress would be somewhat better in West Bengal due to enlightened communist rule with its pro-people outlook. That greater penetration of the state and the party would ensure a basic level of development with a visible reduction in gender bias in the delivery of social services and in political participation. This hope is however belied. Indeed, the same dismal phenomena of low sex ratios creeping in and expansion of dowry to communities hitherto untouched by it (among lower castes and Muslims, for instance) is brought out by the report. The question as to why this is happening is not raised. There is also silence on the larger question of whether a different political framework and consistent rule by a party with a progressive ideology and grass roots reach has had any impact in altering the structural gender bias present in Indian society. Since the chequered scenario revealed is pretty much similar to the rest of India, the policy recommendations towards the end of the report need to be advocated nationally.■

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GENDER AND CONFLICT
By Shoma A Chatterji
UBSPD, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 233, Rs. 295.00

Themes related to conflict are being opened up to scholarly analysis in several universities in India. In the West, full-fledged departments and courses in conflict studies, conflict transformation, peace studies and security studies already exist. The publishers have obviously tried to strike while the iron was hot. Unseemly haste to bring out this book—undoubtedly with an eye on the growing market—has proved counter-productive. A book so badly written and produced can actually end up damaging the causes it seeks to represent.

To begin with a reader looks for the usual page of Contents, but finds it missing. After wading through a five-page Preface and a 36-page Introduction, inexplicably one suddenly discovers the Contents page!

Chapter One, on 'Gender versus Power', is based on indiscriminate juxtaposition of disparate material on the theme on gender. Theories are juggled together until it makes one's head spin. Glitches abound *on every page.* The following sentence (about war-related psychiatric problems faced by women) is typical:

> Other problems are depression following loss of loved ones, property, dignity, virginity, anxiety and PTSD (p. xxvii).

It is true that in the Preface Chatterji excuses her lack of scholarship, saying, "…my lack of scholarly intellect has conditioned me to write in as simple and straightforward a manner as possible, trying to keep away from jargon, mystification and academic scholarship as much as possible" (p xii). In fact each page of the book leads one further into a jungle of jargon and mystification – sans any signs of rigorous academic scholarship. But even if she is writing, as she claims, to reach out to the lay reader, how can the gross violation of basic codes of accuracy, referencing and clarity be justified?

Citing an article (unnamed, unreferenced) by R. Delmar, Chatterji writes –

> To quote Delmar: "If the origin of the family constituted an achievement, it was this, that it asserted women's oppression as a problem of history, rather than of biology, a problem which is the concern of historical materialism to analyse and revolutionary politics to solve." (p. 8)

It does not require great scholarship to realize that the 'origin of the family' mentioned above should actually be replaced by the title of Engels classic *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State.*

Are we then supposed to accept gratuitous borrowings from academe, unacknowledged and dishonored, under the guise of greater access to the lay reader? In its carelessness, the book insults those whose work it picks from and throws together in a confusing, shapeless mass.

In spite of the shortcomings, Chatterji seems to care passionately about many of the issues she brings up. These issues require urgent exploration and discussion. Chapter headings are promising – for instance 'A Global Perspective on Women and Conflict' (Chapter 3) and 'Women and the Peace Movement' (Chapter 5). Important facts and meaningful insights are scattered at random through the pages of the book. Yet the carelessness and lack of organization is so pervasive and so overwhelming that she ends up foisting an unreadable book upon an unsuspecting public.

A great pity – for lost and buried within this book are the seeds of a really useful text.■

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Aur Todi Bhi

Anamika

JAHAN AURATEN GARHI JAATI HAIN
By Mrinal Pandey
Radhakrishna Prakashan, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 148, Rs.175.00

Jack and Jill/ Went up the hill/ To fetch a pail of water/ Jack fell down/ And broke his crown/ And Jill came tumbling after.

As a little girl I always wondered why Jill lost her cool when Jack fell down and broke his crown! Did she tumble down out of mere empathy? She could very well have run after him and nursed his wounds. Why tumble down?

Now, of course, I understand that the whole idea of 'tumbling after' can be traced back to the other orientedness of girls/women all the world over. Feminists all the world over defend women's right to 'play' as, in some sense, a retreat from this long term sense of duty, the service ethic that women have, for centuries, been subtly (and not so subtly) maneuvered into.

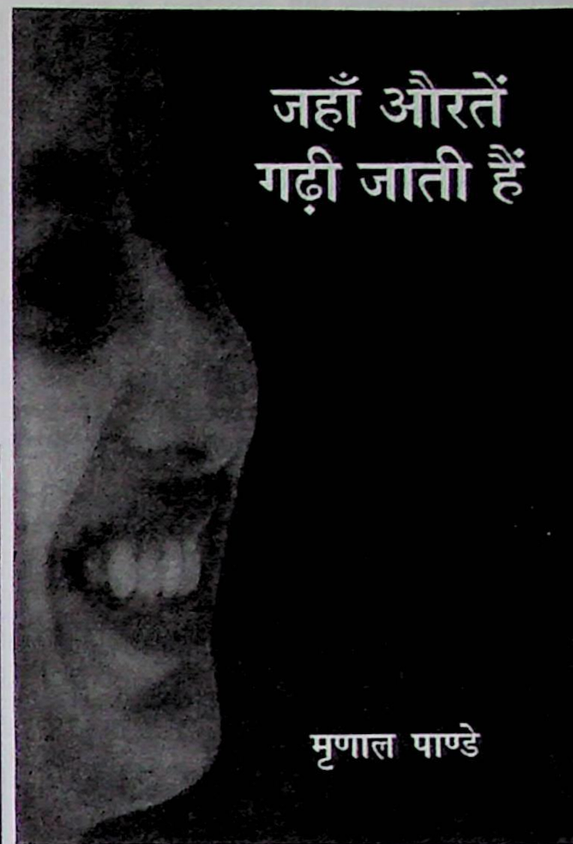
All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy but Jills, and not only Jills but Dhaniyas, Munias, Razias and Nomchungs of the Third World too, remain bright and beautiful even under the tremendous pressure of unrewarded work and drudgery of all kinds. Against all odds they smile and laugh the laugh of Medusa (or is it the 'Attahas' of the local devies Mrinal beautifully portrays in another feminist treatise published earlier?)

Ticking off that 'Poor Liza complex' and 'good girl syndrome' now these women smile on or off screen, but behind these 'close up smiles' loom shadows as dark and dismal as a haunted greenroom backstage. Even those who have made it big in life – film heroines, theatre-artists, major writers, Mother Hubbards, beauty pageants, Panchayat Pradhans, musicians, TV anchors, publishers, journalists… have a long story of sharp gender discrimination to unfold. The gap between the real and the virtual has been insightfully analysed in Mrinal Pande's recent collection of essays called *Jahan Auraten Garhi Jati Hain.*

Mrinal's feminist intervention marks the rise of an Asian discourse. Her first hand exposure to the ground realities of the rural, urban and sub-urban terrains and her intelligent research in the areas of women's health, education politics, and women's writing get her language multi-centric and her vision sharp. A sense of sardonic humour underlines her whole discourse, especially her ironic observations like the following :

"Ek bholi, sadgrihastha mahila yadi yauvan mein prayah ekaki ya pati dwara upekshit rahti hai to youvavastha mein pharratedar jeevan jeenewali dhansampanna rahi roopajeeva burhape mein." (A cursed loneliness is a must for women : gentlewomen remain lonely, utterly neglected by their husbands in the prime years and the glamour girls fall lonely in their old age) (p.16).

- At the age of 20 children are as accustomed to the bla-bla-bla of Moms as oldies to their delicate digestion. (Neeche Se Oopar, Ooper Se Neeche, p.31)
- Towards the end all of us (ageing, greying, hurt, baffled first generation migrants) are bound to fall back upon the towns we had left behind. Those memoirs lie tattoed on our dazed self. (Ma Aur Main, p.39)
- Time flows past everyone. All of us wish to lock our Mother Time, The great Mahakali in a close embrace, but we can't block natural fluidity. (Ma Aur Main, p.44)
- Why should the Indian society, boarded on the sinking Titanic of a joint family system, wave a green signal to the fond couples? (Feel Good Year Aur Valentine Day)
- 'Beauty Pageant and Miss World' shows are on their last leg in the West. Like the circus they'll soon be wiped off. (Chauthi Kasam Urph Pakdi Gayi Miss India, p.112)
- What is motherhood?... Is it a purely emotive experience, beyond all logic, a divine essence slowly and delicately distilled in the huge retorts of personal and racial memoirs? (Matridivas Ke Bahane Kuch Moortibhanjak Vichaar, p. 115)
- The independence of Kali and Nachiketa and their Indian version of 'Mukti' (salvation) are sublime, no doubt, but they don't take any mundane attempt at granting an equitable order to the mankind. (Swatantrata Kya Hai, p. 126)
- Even when the structure of the TV-programme was a potpourri of 'Apki Adalat' and 'India Bole', the three characters of the Gudiya episode were different from the usual intellectuals dabbling in a shakalakaboom-boom..discourse (Ao Gudiya Se Khelen: Ek Horror Show, p.13) (translations mine)



A beautiful collage of facts and datas, soundbytes from real interviews/ chit-chats/ memoirs, quotes and snippets – this is a readable collection of essays, columns, critical and creative reflections on life, literature, cinema, TV shows, women's education, women empowerment, reservation, motherhood, love, liberty, 'the feel good' syndrome, Valentine's Day and other cultural shifts in the backyard of the global village. In the brilliant flash of an extraordinarily lucid and masterfully vibrant language – this culture critic strikes us as a '*ras siddha quisasgo*', especially when she is delineating characters and narrating situations. The ironic punch and the idiomatic vigour of her informal narration has the remarkable glow of those unending gossip sessions in the usual *antahpurams*. Endowed both with 'sense' and 'humour' – Mrinal is dispassionately honest in the analysis of the 'self' too: I won't say that she talks about 'Ma' with the brutal punch of Sylvia Plath in 'Daddy', but she is fairly objective. The delicate balance between the 'subjective' and the 'objective' is something that determines the calibre of a writer. Plath subjectifies history by a complex amalgamation of her own dead father with the 'Daddy' in Hitler. Mrinal internalizes the 'other' in her 'mother' almost like Alice Walker and wonders how over the years, she has started talking to her daughters in Ma's language.

Marxist in the perception of a non-sectarian, non-hierarchical developmental model, post-colonial in the hunt of the unofficial, off-the-record primary sources and poststructuralist in

A beautiful collage of facts and datas, soundbytes from real interviews/ chit-chats/ memoirs, quotes and snippets – this is a readable collection of essays, columns, critical and creative reflections on life, literature, cinema, TV shows, women's education, women empowerment, reservation, motherhood, love, liberty, 'the feel good' syndrome, Valentine's Day and other cultural shifts in the backyard of the global village.

its notion of language and identity – Mrinal's feminism is basically addressed by the liberal humanist view of empowering 'inner resources'. She acknowledges that a substantive human essence transcends all forms of socio-economic power play. As a sensitive woman inhabiting complex, multilayered realities, she also feels that empowering the 'inner resources' is not enough.

Mrinal's is basically a transformative politics with a potential to initiate change towards a more equitable society. If it may be called an ideology in the established sense of the term, it is an ideology of support for those who are deprived and exploited by the institutionalized structures of control and operate in different forms in different social formations. The dynamic strength of her feminism lies in its constant questioning of structures and hierarchy on the one hand, and its constant battle against division and isolationism on the other.

The Confucian, Buddhist and Gandhian paradigms stand like three Bodhi trees on the bank of the Asian discourse of feminism and Mrinal's stand on the question of motherhood, beauty culture, superficiality of cultural change, dimensions of narrow rationalism and individualism proposed by western modernity, focus on (i) subjectivity formation, (ii) media activism, (iii) the need to live decently without throwing ourselves into the sea of greed continuously created by male centred commercialism and global waves of capitalism. Mrinal actually reminds us of Cho Ilaejoang, Alda Facio and other outstanding feminists of the Third World. A realistic dreamer, she is painfully aware of the crisis in the cultural industry. Dead against the idea of picking pretty girls like choosing apples, she is committed to the cause of celebrating feminism as a life preserving, revitalizing movement of humane peace activists.■

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Evoking The Ambience of A Place And Its People

Meenakshi Mukherjee

PATNA ROUGHCUT
By Siddharth Chowdhury
Picador India, 2005, pp.186, Rs. 250.00

"Trinidad was small , remote and unimportant, and we knew we could not hope to read in books of the life we saw about us". Replace 'Trinidad' with 'Patna' in that statement by Naipaul, and that is precisely what we felt a generation ago growing up there. Patna was not all that small or remote – capital of a large state before it was truncated, prominently paced in the railway as well the river map of India. Certainly not unimportant because every child knew by heart its heritage from the time Emperor Ashoka issued his rock edicts from Pataliputra to the time it gave India its first President. But a place does not become real just because it appears in history and geography books, literary representations confer on it a different kind of validity—a life in imagination—which Patna lacked. At least in living memory. Patna might have figured in the "magic realist chronicle" * of Megasthenes or in the accounts of Huen Tsiang but that was no use to us who spent hours reading English novels about London and New York borrowed from the Patna College library and devoured Bangla fiction from the bookshelves at home in which Kolkata loomed large as the centre of the world. .If only E.M. Forster had called Chandrapur by its real name we would have had some consolation. But no writer called Patna by its real name—not even the writer of a more recent generation who preferred to situate *A Suitable Boy* in Brahmpur. That is why Siddharth Chowdhury takes one by surprise : not only does he name Patna as the location of his stories—he flaunts the place name even in the title.

Patna Roughcut is a remarkable book in many ways: it is funny and sad at the same time, conveying a haunting sense of loss and fear of failure that stalks the lives of the characters. In an evanescent and whimsical way it manages to capture the precariousness of relationships, the intimacy as well as the claustrophobia of a small town , and also the cruelty and violence that lurks just beneath the surface. But certainly one of the reasons—though not the only one—why the book moved me is its vivid evocation of a place and an ambience that have shaped my own life. At first I thought I would keep this subjective element out of this review, but it would have been disingenuous not to admit to this added pleasure of recognition. The landmarks and street names of Patna are not just mentioned to add local colour—they are used creatively. Take for example Golghar, a huge black structure like a rounded pyramid—built by the British in the 18th century as a granary which is now one of the few tourist spots in the city. As a building Golghar is as unique to Patna as Char Minar is to Hyderabad. This building gets woven into Chowdhury's book like a leitmotif. On the second page we read about Ritwik the journalist reporting a death inside this odd structure. Some 180 pages later when the book is about to end we are taken to the top of Golghar again where Ritwik briefly meets his former girl friend Mira 'for a final closure'. Mira remembers a line from Ritwik's early short story describing Golghar: "A huge, coiled staircase runs the full length of the outer walls, right to the top, and from where one can have a bird's eye view of the entire city". We have come across this sentence already in the first section. This playful intertextuality turns the reality of one section into the fiction of another. There are stories within stories, but the final bird's eye view from the top of Golghar gathers them all together in a wave of nostalgia.

Ritwik Ray, the journalist/writer through whose voice a good part of the novel (is it a novel ? I will come to that later) is narrated, we learn has published a limited edition of his stories about Patna—*Harryda and Other Stories*—for private circulation Mira Verma, a Patna girl—now in Columbia University—who after writing 10,000 words thinks she is almost a novelist, asks Ritwik for copies of his book.. Solicitously, if not patronizingly she offers to help Ritwik by showing a copy of this collection to her publisher in New York. Ritwik replies "I will give you the copies. Give it to your friends. I would prefer if you didn't show it to your publisher. There is no point, they wouldn't know anything about Patna." The same kind of indifference to the readership outside Patna marks Siddharth Chowdhury's tone in the book. Take it or leave it—if you do not know the social difference between Kadam Kuan and Pataliputra Colony, he is not going

to tell you. Very likely you will take it, for the same reason that you read *Miguel Street* or *Swami and Friends* even though you have never lived in Port of Spain or Malgudi.

Patna Roughcut consists of five interlinked stories – three told by Ritwik, one by Sudama Pathak and the last one titled 'Waiting for Godard' is in the voice of Mira Verma. The stories can be read independently but characters from one story appear in the others and there is a gradual build up although not quite like in a novel. There should be a term for this genre—which was used by Susan Vishwanathan a few years ago in an exquisite collection *Something Barely Remembered,* a book that I am surprised did not become better-known. An astonishing range of vividly created people animate Chowdhury's book—the dadas who meet at Annapoorna Café over half-chai for adda and smutty gossip, Dular Mandal MLC, who feels obliged to abduct people if they forget to send him a Qualis gratis before opening a Toyota showroon in Patna, Samar Sinha the 'local lad' who made good abroad as a subaltern historian after writing a definitive book on the Jayprakash movement in Bihar. Then there are characters who are the stuff of legends—Babu Mrinal Thakur-Chowdhury an impoverished aristrocrat who after his usual four whiskies disappears one moonlit night from the Bankipur Club lawns, and Ila Lytton-Mowbray a beautiful young firebrand, abandoned both by her Irish father and Bengali mother, who goes to JNU to study and gets killed while performing a street play in Delhi. But I think the most memorable—perhaps also the most emblematic—is Harryda, who initiated young Ritwik into the world of books and films. The handsome dreamer who refused to work, heart-throb of many girls in Patna, Harryda eventually became an alcoholic and started living with Budhan dhobi's daughter in a jhuggi. When Harryda died there was no one to cremate him – he was taken to the Baans Ghat in a thela pulled by Madhubala, Budhan dhobi's donkey.

As in his earlier volume of short stories *Diksha at St. Martin's* (2002), books and films form the subtext of Siddharth Chowdhury's present book as well. And music and cricket. 25th June 1983—the date of India winning the Prudential World Cup is almost as important in the book as 15th August 1947. The central character Ritwik Ray (whose name itself is a self-conscious allusion to two film-makers) remains an incorrigible romantic till the end, yet the author can unflinchingly highlight the ironies that fracture contemporary life in upper caste, English medium India. The contradictions of this middle class are not confined to Patna, they spill over to Delhi as well—which Chowdhury considers "Patna's twin city – separated by five hundred miles."

There is nostalgia but very little sentimentality in *Patna Roughcut*. After Ritwik meets in the coffee house Phanishwar Nath 'Renu' the famous author of *Maila Anchal* who lived in Patna for a while in considerable poverty, he passes his literary verdict on the city : "Patna, though more sinned against than sinning, is simply a place with no literary traditions and whatever few writers, poets, novelists that have emerged are not because of it but in spite of it." Is the author about to disprove this statement made by his character Ritwik? Siddharth Chowdhury could well be a writer because of Patna, not in spite of it. At least so far. We will have to wait for his next book to know for sure.■

Reference

* This phrase is quoted from a sentence in *Patna Roughcut* about the Ganga : "on the banks of which, around fourth century B.C. Megasthenes must have taken his morning walks , all the while contemplating the next folio of his magic- realist chronicle of Patna."

Meenakshi Mukherjee grew up in Patna. After spending over two decades in Delhi is now settled in Hyderabad.

The Transplanted People

Eunice de Souza

BRIDELESS IN WEMBLEY
By Sanjay Suri
Penguin Viking, Delhi, 2006, pp. 381, Rs. 495.00

LONDONSTANI
By Gautam Malkani
Fourth Estate, London, 2006, pp. 342, £12.99

"The way Indians were being Indian, someone had to take notes, and do no more, really," Suri writes in his Introduction. He also tells us what this book is not. "It does not offer dining-table wisdom of the 'caught-between-two-worlds variety…"

Sanjay Suri, London-based journalist since 1990 has put together a series of accounts about Indians, mainly Hindus who live in England. "The way Indians were being Indian, someone had to take notes, and do no more, really," Suri writes in his Introduction. He also tells us what this book is not. "It does not offer dining-table wisdom of the 'caught-between-two-worlds variety…"

So we meet Dhanjibai Atwal who tricked his way into England, Sikhs agitating about the wearing of helmets, K.D. Patel who has two wives and who, when asked by the author how this happened answers, "It just happened. I just don't know how it happened." Then there are the melas organized by the barber caste, the tailor caste, and various castes and sub-castes of Patels so that their caste members can meet eligible caste members for their sons and daughters, or learn about Hinduism, or preserve their culture or run down members of a splinter group. There's an Agony Aunt, Kailash Puri of Liverpool who has been answering thousands of letters about personal problems such as desperation about being dark, dowry demands, abusive marriages. There's the RSS, and the Krishna devotees, and a procession against the authorities of a small, peaceful village who felt that the thousands turning up at the house donated by George Harrison constituted a nuisance. There are speed-dating events, and Bollywood dance classes for aspiring children. There are families who abandon their elderly parents. There is also one short interview at a madrassa.

The individual accounts are interesting, and occasionally amusing, but the total effect is suffocating. One has to keep reminding oneself that these people are living in England.. But all their concerns centre on marriage, caste, religion, or the rivalry of splinter groups. At a dandia event the author finds two bouncers and an Alsatian at the door, making sure no one from outside the caste enters. "I figured," he writes, "that if they were non-limbachias it would be an intrusion, if they were non-Gujaratis it would be an attack." The reason given by one of the organizers is "to preserve our roots, preserve our traditions." Elsewhere, Suri remarks jokingly about the endless Patel caste divisions, "I left Subhashbhai's house in Kingsbury trying to figure out which Patel had told me once that Sardar Patel could unite India but he's failed to unite the Patels."

Not a single Indian in the entire book shows any interest in the culture and history of the host country. There is no mention of a single British writer, or Indian writer in Britain for that matter, no plays, no music, nothing, not even a flower show. Britain is the place to make money, to bring relatives by hook or by crook. If some whites appear it is only as people who make racist remarks or throw stones at Indian windows. One white woman writes to the Agony Aunt because the Indian guy she has been involved with for three and a half years, and who she considers a soul mate, doesn't have the gumption to marry her when she discovers she is pregnant. The Agony Aunt makes some vaguely sympathetic noises but goes on to assure her that "Single women should know that whether a woman has friendship or a physical relationship, the woman gets a bad name." She also tells her that "Because boys go out with English girls, it is causing difficulties and divorces within Asian society." If some minor white politician appears, it is to praise the Indian community for their hard work. Suri does warn us, in a dismissive phrase, that he does not offer dining-room wisdom about the caught between two worlds business. But the people he has depicted don't inhabit two worlds—they seem to inhabit just one fossilized one. They all sound like people one would want to avoid like the plague.

Given the stories he is narrating, the divisiveness of the groups and sub-groups, and his own knowledge of India, it is surprising that Suri can say, "Maybe I'm biased because of my own irredeemable immersion in ways Indian, but I could argue that Indians who present themselves as differently coloured cultural Brits are a minority. Just count the youngsters at Navratri, and there can't be that many others left." What exactly are "ways Indian?" It's a contested phrase, but Suri uses it quite glibly. It makes one wonder where he is coming from. Is he as unquestioningly traditional, as fossilized as the rest?

Gautam Malkani's *Londonstani* is an interesting debut. Malkani grew up in Hounslow, and his characters inhabit that setting. close to Heathrow. Four young Indian boys are part of a gang dealing in stolen mobiles, indulging in street-fighting, ogling women, bunking classes and the rest. Part of the interest of the novel is in the language Malkani gives the characters, though it tends to become tedious after a while. As the blurb describes it, it is a mix of slang, Bollywood, texting, Punjabi and bastardized gangsta rap. What's interesting too is that in some ways the characters, though gangsters, are not all that different from the "respectable" citizens of Suri's book. Hardjit, the ring leader fights Muslims, whites who he alleges calls him a Paki, is aggressive with what he thinks of as Anglicized Indians even when they have nothing to do with him. Arun, the brother of a gang member is trying to get his parents to accept the girl to whom he is engaged, but his mother in particular constantly feels that the girl's side is not giving her enough respect. Arun tries to get her to explain why she believes in certain traditions but the only reason she can give is that it is tradition. After several major rows in the family, Arun commits suicide. The story is told by Jas, who turns out at the end of the book (though there is the occasional hint) to be a white boy, Jason Bartholomew-Cliveden who is really on the fringes of the gang and is desperate to be fully accepted. I'm not sure this sudden revelation works. It's a bit too melodramatic. As the copy sent for review is an Uncorrected Proof, quotation is not allowed. But the book is worth a quick look.■

Eunice de Souza is a poet, novelist and editor. She retired as Head of the English Department of St Xavier's College, Bombay in 2000.

A Techno Tale

Shyamala A. Narayan

LABYRINTH: A NOVEL
By Arunabha Sengupta
Writers Workshop, Calcutta, 2004, pp. 442, Rs. 450.00 (Hb), Rs. 250.00 (Pb)

Arunabha Sengupta's novel *Labyrinth* is set during the years of the computer boom, when hundreds of young Indians found work on the Y2K problem. It gives a vivid picture of their life in a huge software company, interwoven with a tale of young love. In some respects, it parallels Chetan Bhagat's bestselling novel, *Five Point Someone: What not to do at IIT* (published last year). Bhagat presented the life of three young men who join the Indian Institute of Technology, after tough competition. *Labyrinth* shows these brilliant engineering graduates caught in the labyrinth of a huge software company.

The two principal characters, Kiran Arothe and Vikram Gupta, resemble the young author. Vikram Gupta, like Arunabha Sengupta (b. 1973) has a Masters degree in Statistics from the Indian Statistical Institute, Calcutta, and joins "Adieu Consultancy Solutions" straight from the campus. The author worked in T.C.S. (Tata Consultancy Services) initially. The vivid dislike of everything in Chennai, the food, the weather, the work atmosphere, and the longing to get back to Calcutta to his mother and dog, reflect the young author's own life. (The blurb informs us that Sengupta "currently works for Cognizant Technology Solutions, and lives in Salt Lake, Kolkata, with his mother, wife, daughter and a Golden Retriever.") Kiran Arothe is a senior software engineer, who has joined ACS because they promised to post him in Bombay after the initial orientation.

A.C.S. is shown as a soul-less company, interested only in profits. When it comes to recruiting young people from college campuses, they paint a rosy picture of their future career; once they have been inducted, they are made to sign a three-year bond. But youngsters still leave, in spite of this. So the Vice President, Digambaram, and Dr Nageshwar, head of the Human Resource Department, get the brilliant idea of making the youngsters submit their original certificates. How Vikram manages to outwit the company, and get justice for Kiran Arothe, forms the plot of the novel.

Vikram Gupta is a refreshingly different protagonist; he does not suffer from any deep-seated anxiety, or worry about the clash between modernity and tradition in India, or any such highly philosophical predicament. His peculiar sense of humour, love of practical jokes and irreverence for authority enables him to take on the corporate might of the software giant. ACS has an unduly high opinion of their training programme:

L1M12 was having their final class. "Effective Presentation." That was the class where in eight hours the instructor was supposed to remove all the habits and mannerisms that people had developed for over two decades and make each and every one a fantastic speaker. They were even shown video recordings of speeches of great orators. Vikram's batch had been shown speeches of John F. Kennedy, Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr.

He is the *enfant terrible* who asks embarrassing questions, "At the end of it all Vikram had asked whether there was any special reason for showing videos of speakers who had all been assassinated" (p.196).

There is a wide variety of characters. There is no attempt to present all managers as villains and the young recruits as angels. The author understands the psychology of the young people well.

The novel presents a true picture of the Indian workplace—differences based on region are there, but the difference in terms of individual characteristics is greater. This novel reveals the vitality and variety of Indian English fiction. The language does not draw attention to itself, the novelist is interested primarily in spinning a yarn. It is confined entirely to metropolitan India; but no work can encompass the whole of India, and the software professional and the metropolis are as much a part of India as the farmer and the village. Stereotypes, whether in terms of characters or situations, are avoided. Perhaps the only cliché in the novel is the title.■

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Different Themes

Ella Datta

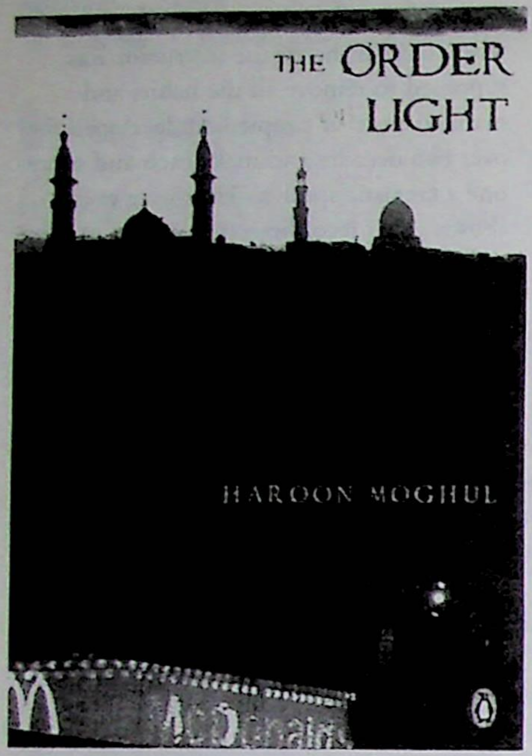
THE ORDER OF LIGHT
By Haroon Moghul
Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2005, pp.274, Rs. 250.00

THE LUNATIC FROM MULTAN
By Rajeev Jacob
Lancer's Books, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 217, Rs. 295.00

Ever since Islam has been on the dock following 9/11, there has been a spate of fiction located in west and south Asia and other regions where Islam dominates. *The Order of Light* is set in Cairo in Egypt, whereas *The Lunatic of Multan* is set in both Pakistan and India.

The two books are poles apart in their approach and the flavour of writing. *The Order of Light* is metaphysical in tone and dwells on an interface between the future and the present with shades of the past colouring the scenario. *The Lunatic of Multan,* on the other hand, is a fast-paced, cloak-and-dagger spy thriller. In the first book nothing much happens by way of plot. In the second, the plot is full of incidents and encounters that unfold with such dizzying speed that once even the author got a character's name confused. Brigadier Bakhtiar Rana, a retired Pakistani army officer, is addressed as Zubin by his wife, seven pages after he first appears.

The protagonist of *The Order of Light* is a young American of Pakistani origin. During a summer vacation, he decides to study Arabic language and Islam. The year is 2001 and the time a few months before 9/11. In Cairo, he meets Haris, an Indian Muslim, who has also come with the same purpose.



The two young men share an apartment.

The protagonist who is the narrator describes the ennui that he feels with life in Cairo. Both the young men are confused, alienated and have serious questions about both their religious identity and the mercantile capitalism of the US. And yet the narrator is not prepared to reject Islam.

The narrator's only sense of release is when he runs far and long from his base, his apartment. During one such run at night, he comes across an esoteric sect in a dilapidated mosque led by Rojet Dahati. The members of the sect are of Kurdish origin and their lives belong to a future, but somehow they have travelled back in time to 2001. Their aim is to revive the glory of Islam as it had been at the time of Salah al –Din. So they plan a series of suicides in crowded areas of Cairo to become martyrs and proclaim their mission, the cause of Islam. Dahati's followers are martyrs who kill themselves, unlike some misguided people who kill others.

Through the dialogues between the narrator and Dahati and his followers, he slowly comes to realize the meaning of his life and his identity as a Muslim. Like a Ustad explaining the secret paths of Sufi mysticism to attain enlightenment, Dahati shows the way to the narrator.

Right through the narrative, oblique references are made to the clash of civilizations. And the author, consciously or otherwise, reaffirms the primacy of Muslim identity. One of the characters in the book, a young Egyptian named Mabayn confesses to falling in love with a Christian girl. And Mabayn is the only one who dies in a traffic accident caused by one suicide mission at a busy street crossing.

It is interesting how in spite of being weighed down with dialogues, the narrative manages to retain an interest in the story of alienation and the reclamation of identity albeit at a lugubrious pace. It is odd that Moghul's narrator, to escape himself and his milieu, takes to running. The gravitas of Moghul's subject becomes so overpowering that it smothers all traces of wit.

The setting of Jacob's *The Lunatic from Multan* is 1983, twelve years after the 1971 Indo-Pak war. A group of Indian prisoners-of-war are kept back in a Pakistani asylum. When it comes to exchanging prisoners-of-war, an equal number of Pakistani agents, on whom plastic surgery is done to resemble the detained prisoners-of-war, are sent back to infiltrate the defence forces. They regularly sent back classified information to Pakistan.

Meanwhile, the detained prisoners-of-war are drugged, medicated and brutally tortured in the asylum so that they lose their memory and identity. One day unable to bear the inhuman treatment, the inmates of the asylum break out. Most of them are recaptured. However, one Captain Aroon Malgonkar retains some vestiges of subconscious impressions, which prompt him to evade Pakistani defence and police forces and escape across the Indian borders. In the process he regains his memory and he needs all his wits to reach safe haven. The Pakistani skullduggery is exposed. The Pak secret agents are killed by their own people in fake accidents to destroy evidence. The escape of the Indian army officer and the thrilling chase given to him is a story of courage, stamina, clever stratagem and an element of amorality for a noble cause like patriotism. Killing the enemy does not cause any qualms.

The complicated plot of this story has an authentic touch when it comes to describing military operations. It has been delineated in such stark shades of black and white that it could have been concocted in some laboratory of Indian counterintelligence. All Pakistanis are bad and some definitely evil. The Indians in contrast are good, above board. The same, of course, cannot be said of Pakistani moles in Indian army. Take Colonel Tarun Mahindra, military intelligence head of the Western Command. He is in close touch with Pakistani intelligence and is ready to do their bidding. It is bad enough that he is betraying his country but his immorality is further underscored by portraying him as a promiscuous man.

No pity or stirrings of conscience is felt when Malgonkar kills Brigadier Rana in Pakistan or Colonel Mahindra and his driver in India. He does what had to be done for the security of his country. This thriller offers kicks for those who are looking for an exciting read for a journey. But on a deeper level it should be analysed for creating stereotypes that widen the breach between countries and people. Remember the models created for spy thrillers during the Cold War?

Ella Datta is a writer and journalist. She is the author of *Ganesh Pyne: His Life and Times* (CIMA), *The Art of A Ramachandran* (Roli Books) and *Lines and Colours* (NBT).

March 2, 2006 Indo-US civil nuclear agreement "I was filled with a sense of satisfaction", recalling his own patient dialogue with his US partner, Strobe Talbot, without which "this outcome would have been difficult". Therefore, the partisan praise and blame heard on either side on both issues was and remains excessive and largely rhetorical.

Secrecy about the projected nuclear test was maintained in 1998. Not so in 1995. Enter the "mole" that Jaswant Singh introduces through a letter to an unnamed US Senator (why?) presumably written by an American diplomat/CIA agent in Delhi and handed over to him while Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha. If the object was to tempt leakage of the contents to embarrass the Narasimha Rao government, the gambit failed. Jaswant Singh says he did nothing nor told anybody, only to reproduce a paraphrased account of it in this volume 11 years later! This is a surprising sequence of events and something of a departure from "a call to honour". Even if the letter was a hoax, a crude piece of CIA disinformation, prudence and national interest demanded that the letter be passed on to the Government for information and investigation.

The narrative of India-Pakistan relations through Lahore, Kargil, Agra, Kandahar and Operation Parakram traverses familiar ground but with interesting personal nuances. With regard to the IA-814 hijack, Jaswant Singh narrates India's helplessness once the aircraft landed in Kandahar where the Taliban and, behind it, Paksitan's ISI was in control. His first instinct was not to yield to pressure. But he gradually changed his mind, weighing "two moral rights", holding out against the demand to release three notorious terrorists wanted back by Pakistan and thereby fighting terror against saving the lives of 161 innocent men, women and children on board. He chose life, he says. These are never easy choices, but Jaswant Singh does not speak of the Indian media's role in translating understandable family and national emotions into political pressure through the venting of public hysteria. The ransom of $ 200 million demanded was never paid.

Agra was a brave effort by Vajpayee to revive the Lahore process after the bitter Kargil betrayal. It failed because of Musharraf's grandstand and not because the Indian side reneged on any draft agreement, as Jaswant Singh makes plain. There simply was nothing more than a series of tentative drafts in a fugitive effort to agree on a joint formulation that might be acceptable to the two principals. Musharraf had deliberately scorned any preparation or agenda. He saw the visit as a media blitz and photo opportunity. The Indian media naively allowed itself to be used.

Until Kargil, the US had consistently favoured Pakistan, a military ally and frontline state but returned to that posture shortly thereafter. Thus Operation Parakram, mounted after ever bolder terrorist assaults on India, culminating in the December 13, 2001 attack on Parliament House, was an exercise in coercive diplomacy that worked. It caused the US to put pressure on Pakistan to curb cross border terrorism from its soil, resulting in Musharraf's January 12, 2002 speech denouncing jihadi fundamentalism and stating that no organization would be allowed to engage in terrorism in the name of Kashmir – a promise yet to be fulfilled.

However, Kargil did witness the beginnings of change in Indo-US relations, despite hiccups. Jaswant Singh elaborates on his talks with Strobe Talbot and the four benchmarks he set. These were progress on India's willingness to go along with the CTBT (which the US Senate finally buried), a ban on fissile material production for nuclear weapons, "strategic restraint" with regard to missile development, and a J&K settlement. In all cases the onus of performance was placed on India. The Americans kept alive the scare of Indo-Pakistan relations reaching a "nuclear flashpoint", allowing Pakistan to trade on this syndrome and make Kashmir a driver of US policy. This duality in US policy towards India continues. "Please don't undermine our war in Afghanistan", Jaswant Singh recalls Colin Powell, then US Secretary of State, repeatedly telling him. He is scathing about America's turning a Nelson's eye towards Pakistan's nuclear proliferation and Dr A.Q. Khan's escapades. Nor did the US "now the virtual ruler of Afghanistan" hand over the then Taliban foreign minister, Muttavakil, for prosecution for his role in the IC 814 hijack, as repeatedly sought by Delhi. "That is the extent of cooperation with India, so far, in this joint fight against terrorism". He also questions elements of the Bush administration's National Security Strategy of 2002 with its doctrines of pre-emptive military action and unilateral force in the face of emerging threats, outside the ambit of the United Nations.

There are finally some interesting asides in Jaswant Singh's concluding Afterword. He wonders if it was wise for India to have "interfered" in Bangladesh in 1971 when, given patience, it would have separated from Pakistan on its own. That must remain among the "if's" of history but was not a question asked at the time. He also speculates on the future of proliferation post-Iraq and post-Iran. He argues that there cannot be double standards here between nuclear haves and have-nots, nor can arms control be achieved without non-proliferation of small arms, the armoury of terror.

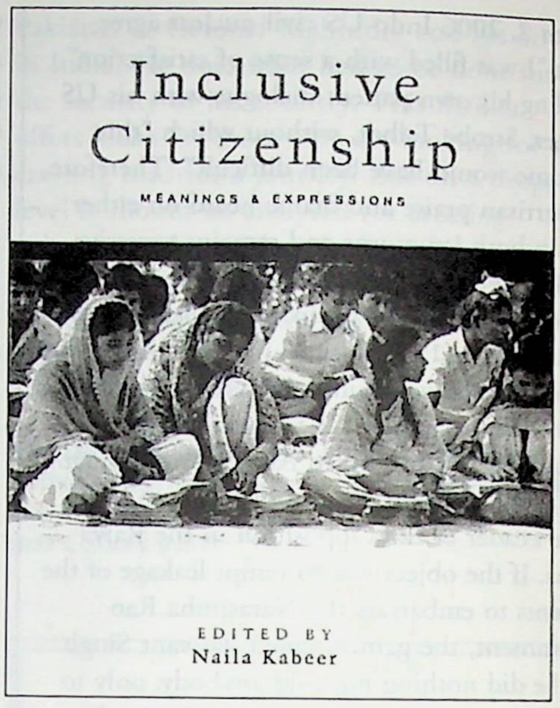
These are good questions in an eminently readable book that both informs and remembers the past to point towards the future.■

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Inclusive Citizenship and the Calling of Transformations

Ananta Kumar Giri

INCLUSIVE CITIZENSHIP: MEANINGS AND EXPRESSIONS
Edited by Naila Kabeer
Zubaan, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 274, Rs. 350.00



Realization of creative possiblities in citizenship is an imporant part of the emancipatory politics of modernity but citizenship in itself as it is tied to the bounded logic of the nation-state in modernity is as much exclusionary as it is emancipatory. The story of citizenship in the modern world is thus a story of struggle to expand its realm to include previously excluded groups—slaves, women, and varieties of racial, religous, ethnic and colonized others. Now this project of expansion is also confronted with a challenge of foundational deepening and broadening, for example, realizing citizenship not only as a political project but also as a multidimensional project of being and social becoming—political, moral and spiritual.

The present book offers an invitation to some new horizons of citizenship. This emerges in Naila Kabeer's insightful introduction, and several contributions, especially that of Evelina Dagnino. In her article on Brazil, "'We all have rights, but': Contesting Concepts of Citizenship in Brazil" Dagnino tells us how the struggle for citizenship is a "struggle for a new sociability": "a more egalitarian framework of social relations at all levels; new rules for living together in society and for the negotiation of conflict; a new sense of public order and public responsibility; a new social contract" (p. 154). It also means that "the recognition of rights should not only regulate relations between the state and the individual, but has to be established within society itself, as the parameter governing social relations at all levels. *Such a political strategy implies moral and intellectual reform, a fresh process of social learning, a building of a new kind of social relations.* This implies the constitution of citizens as active social subjects. For society as a whole, it requires learning to live on different terms with these *emergent citizens who refuse to remain in the place socially and culturally defined for them*" (pp. 154-155; emphases added).

In her introduction to the volume Naila Kabeer who teaches at the Institute of Development Studies, Sussex and is noted for her work on gender, education and development elaborates different values and meanings of inclusive citizenship in the context of empirical work on these issues in different parts of the world: England, India, Bangladesh, South Africa, Brazil, Nigeria, and Mexico. For her, "a great deal of the theoretical debate about citizenship today is taking place in an 'empirical void' where the views and perspectives of 'ordinary citizens' are largely absent. We do not know what citizenship means to people—particularly people whose status as citizens is either non-existent or extremely precarious—or what these meanings tell us about the goal of building inclusive societies" (p. 1). The values and meanings of inclusive citizenship that Kabeer and her co-contributors present are: justice, recognition (dignity and respect), self-determination and solidarity. Kabeer comments on William's essay on struggle for citizenship in contemporary South Africa: "The elderly black man in Cape Town who explained to William that his neighbours wanted support but not welfare from the state also expressed a solidartiy with his immediate community and desire for localized forms of self-determination" (p. 7).

Realization of citizenship involves confrontation with and transformation of structures of domination and varieties of absolute power in society. In his contribution in the book, "The Emergence of Human Rights in the North: Towards Historical Re-Evaluation," Neil Stammer tells us how American and French Revolutions were not just parades of bourgeoisie rights, rather be best understood as "struggle against absolute state power" where the particular and the universal are joined through an "emergent sovereignty of people". Rather than looking at human rights as triumph of the universal over the particular, Stammers challenges us to realize: "what may be most positive about the history of struggles for human rights in the North is to be found in their claims to universality, providing that universality is understood not in terms of rights themselves, but in terms of universality of power in the world today that such rights seek to challenge" (pp. 64-65).

This volume on citizenship helps us overcome many of the facile dualisms that constrain prevalent approaches to citizenship such as individualism and particularism, rights and duties. Such a critique of dualism emerges from the actual lives and struggles of people what Celestine Nyambu Musembi calls "an actor-oriented perspective". In her contribution to the volume she refers to anthropologist R.S. Khare's ethnographic work on perception of rights on the part of untouchable women in Lucknow who in their perception of "primary or fundamental rights" integrate a "vision for the individual and the community" (p. 39). Similar is also a move towards a creative transcendence of dualism between individual and community in *A Manual of Muslim Women's Human Rights*: "The manual covers a broad range of 'rights stuations' such as rights within the family, autonomy in family planning decisions, rights to education and employment, and rights to political participation. What makes the manual different from conventional human rights education manuals is that its interactive and interpretive excercises interweave excerpts from international human rights agreements with verses from the Qur'an, sharia rules, stories, idioms and personal experiences" (p. 40).

In this book we also find a different articulation of individual and community in the everyday lives of women in the *favelas* of Brazil where citizenship is being recast through the family. As Joanna Wheeler tells us in her essay on Rio de Janerio in the volume: "Almost every participant considered involvement in the market through employment to be essential but the market logic of efficiency, competitiveness and individualism has been muted through interaction with notion of citizenship in the favelas". At the contemporary moment of neo-liberal globalization and withdrawal of the state, citizenship is being redefined as joining the market as a worker but in Brazil's *favelas*

family is a "key point of articulation between the market and individuals" (p. 106). Wheeler tells about a woman in Rio who would rather travel five hours everday to stay close to her family and kin networks rather than stay closer to her place of work and even earn more. She finds the security and mutual support in her circle of family and kin networks more important than earning more and physical convenience. In this study Wheeler also tells us that dignity is a key concern with her participants. While "seventy-four percent of the participants identified dignity as citizenship's most important characterestic" one woman told Wheeler reieterating her deep concern for dignity: "we are treated like cattle in the clinics, on the buses and shops" (p. 109).

Along with dignity responsibility is a key concern in the emerging narratives of citizenship presented in the book. In their contribution to the volume, "Young people talking about citizenship in Britain", Ruth Lister and her colleagues tell us how "young people take seriously the question of their relationship to the wider society."

However, realization of dignity is a continued struggle in many parts of the world as dominant organizations of citizenship exclude many of our fellow human beings on one basis or another. Oga S. Abah and Jenk S. Okwori tell us how ethnic belonging is crucial to realization of citizenship in the local context of Nigeria but the authors are part of an innovative initiative, Theatre for Development, which helps people to tell their stories of exclusion and denial of rights. Similarly nomadic communities of India, particularly Rajasthan, are subjected to violence and exclusionary assault not only by the state but also by the dominant communities. But here, as Mandakini Pant tells us, their emergent self-awakening is helped by voluntary organizations such as Mukthidhara Sansthan at work in Rajasthan.

Similar work in radical consciousenessraising carried forward by Nijer Kori in Bangladesh is described by Kabeer in the volume. Nijer Kori has "determinedly refused to engage in any form of service delivery" (p. 182) and is engaged in "transforming con-sciousness" (p. 184). Members of Nijer Kori also take membership in other organizations which for them are only agents of service delivery. For example, some women are also members of the Grameen Bank, the widely known agent of micro-credit from Bangladesh. Kabeer presents us the voice of a woman who is simultaneously a member of both Nijer Kori and Grameen Bank:

> We are all poor people. For us to get hold of 3, 000 or 4, 000 takas at one time is not easy. That is why we are members of the Grameen Bank. With Nijer Kori we have savings when we need it. If someone comes to beat one of us, we all sort out the matter together. Grameen would not do this for us. With Nijer Kori they do not give us money but they give us good advice: how we can improve our lives, or what will be good for us in order to create a better future for ourselves (p. 189).

The book also contains other fascinating accounts of struggles for rights. Shireen P. Huq tells us about the work of Naripokho in Bangladesh and its creative struggles around the politics of sexuaity and body. In the workshops that Naripokho organizes cultural sessions provide participants "with a space to sing, dance, recite poetry and generally express the imaginative side of themselves to let their bodies move as they wish and not worry about how their sarees fall" (p. 178). Carlos C. Ruiz presents us the struggle for rights and dignity on the part of indigenous women in Chiapas, Mexico though the divergence between indigenous women's movements and the widely known Zapatista movement hinted in the essay could have been elaborated more. Fran Ansley presents us a fascinating story of struggle for driving license on the part of undocumented workers in Teneessee, USA. Ansley concludes her narration with reflections on duties of citizenship in a globalizing world: "given the role that the USA has played in shaping and constraining the economies of most countries in the world, perhaps it should recognize a specifically *American* duty to admit many more economic refugees for secure and dignified employment in the USA." (..) Perhaps all the nations of the global North should take on coordinated duties of admission, keyed to their respective powers and priorities" (p. 212).

The book also presents struggles around housing and water in South Africa by John Williams and Lyla Mehta. While discussing the difficulties of implementing the right to water in South Africa Mehta nonetheless tells us: "The right to water in principle provides justiciable components to local claims and struggles around water. Finally, universal rights language can be used as a counterveiling force to the commodification of water, which impinges on poor people's right to water" (pp.237-238). The concluding chapter of the book touches upon the missing issue of global citizenship through a presentation of the work of DFID (Department of International Development of UK) in Peru. But with its own uncritical involvement with the neo-liberal international development regime of the current UK Government DFID is not the most appropriate example of global citizenship. As Rosalind Eyben writes: "Greater accountability of state institutions to poor citizens is a key component of DFID's central policy approach to rights and good governance. This should include improving DFID's own accountability to those with whom it works and seeks to help" (p. 260). This internal critique ought to be combined with more radical restructuring of global institutions such as hinted by Kabeer in her introduction: creation of a global fund for development and for undertaking globally responsible policy decisions.

But global citizenship also requires more efforts in the field of self-development and inclusion of the other. Realization of the multidimensional possiblity of citizenship challenges us to go beyond not only the project of the nation-state in the direction of creative post-national transformations but also go beyond the primarily political conception of citizenship and its primary binding to the frame of the polis. To be a citizen is also to be a member of a family at different levels of our interlinked existence and this is a matter of both political and spiritual realization. It is this spiritual dimension of citieznship that can create new possiblities in many contemporary discourses of inclusion which despite their radical rhetorics are none the less closed. Consider here the celebrated political theory of inclusion of the other presented by a key thinker of our times, Jurgen Habermas.

Habemas tell us that inclusion of the other calls for "a morality of equal respect and solidaristic responsibility for everybody."[1] But this needs a lot more self-development in order that it can realize its own aspiration of respecting the otherness of the other. This seems to be missing in a predominantly political approach to inclusion of the other which can lack the sensitivity to enter into the life-worlds of other cultures and religions.[2]

Inclusion of the other including realization of inclusive citizenship invovles transformative initiatives in both dialogues and justice including a dialogical approach to rights, justice, dignity and responsibility—themes touched upon in the book. Though the book touches upon some emerging new initiatives in realizing justice and citizenship it does not invovle cross-cultural and transcivilizational dialogues on these themes. It also does not fully overcome the dualism between the political and moral that underpins many of the contemporary theorists of justice and inclusion—from Rawls to Habermas. Inclusive citizenship today also is confronted with the task of embodying dialogues across borders of cultures, nations, religions and identities involving varieties of cross-cultural, inter-religious, trans-religious and trans-identity dialogues. This is much more urgent now when we are locked in varieties of clashes in the name of our identity, cultures, religions and civilizations. Inclusion of the other thus involves dialogues across varieties of closed boundaries.

The book hints at some emergent self-development in the nararratives of different citizenship struggles but we need more narratives on this as well as on trans-national

movements and trans-border dialogues embodying global citizenship in new ways, embodying not ony the familiar logic of the polis but the subterranean and future language of our planetary family. As Desmond Tutu writes: "How I pray that in our world we can learn to emulate a true family, perhaps then we could address the injustices that cause a small percentage of our world to consume the vast majority of its resources (..)."[3] Thus projects of inclusive citizenship today have to be part of political and spiritual struggles of a new planetary realization and building a new cosmopolitan world which is simulateneously postcolonial and planetary.[4]

References

[1]Jurgen Habermas, *Inclusion of the Other: Studies in Political Theory*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998, p. 5.

[2]A case in point is Habermas's approach to other religions. Habermas writes in his *Religion and Rationality*: "We no longer confront other cultures as alien since their structures still remind us of previous phases of our own social development. What we do encounter as alien within other cultures is the stubborn distinctiveness of their religious cores." (cf. Jurgen Habermas, *Religion and Rationality*, The MIT Press, 2002, p. 156). When pressed to the limits despite his post-metaphysical thinking Habermas acknowledges the significance of the Judaeo-Christian tradition for the project of modernity but he seems not to be offering the same acknowledgment to other traditions such as Buddhism.

[3]Desmond Tutu, *God Has a Dream: A Vision of Hope for Our Times*. London et al: Rider, 2005, p. 23.

[4]Ananta Kumar Giri, "A New Global Humanity and the Calling of a Post-Colonial Cosmopolis: Self-Development, Inclusion of the Other and Planetary Realizations" in *Global Forum of Civilization and Peace*, Academy of Korean Studies, Seoul, forthcoming.

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Linking the General to the Particular

Gurpreet Mahajan

CONFRONTING SAFFRON DEMOGRAPHY: RELIGION, FERTILITY AND WOMEN'S STATUS IN INDIA
By Patricia Jeffrey & Roger Jeffrey
Three Essays Collective, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 132, Rs. 200.00

SECULARISM, COMMUNALISM AND THE INTELLECTUALS
By Zaheer Baber
Three Essays Collective, New Delhi, 2006, pp.85, Rs. 125.00

Academic publishing has grown enormously in India. Over the last decade a number of new publishing houses have entered the business and the list of books published by each of them has also increased significantly. This is by and large a positive development but it has yielded certain peculiarities and left a mark on the kind of books that are being published. The production of edited volumes, which are often little more than seminar proceedings, is on the rise, and many of the single author books are really collections of individually written and published papers.

This is perhaps a trend that is emerging worldwide but in most cases seminar proceedings are revised substantially before publication. Their form and content is rewritten keeping in mind the shared concerns and orientation of the seminar. Likewise, individually written essays by an author are considered for publication when something new, maybe a more nuanced argument or additional essays, is incorporated. At the very least it is expected that these essays have been revised to include new literature in the field or a response to its critics. Unfortunately, in the changed and more competitive milieu that has emerged these are aspects that are often neglected or set aside. Since the publishers are not attentive to these necessary requirements the responsibility lies much more with the authors, and it is they who are going to be blamed for the end-product.

In the book, *Confronting Saffron Demography*, Jeffrey and Jeffrey are to some extent sensitive to these issues. They try to link the three previously published essays that constitute the main core of the book through a brief introduction. Continuing with their work on the Bijnor District, Jeffrey and Jeffrey use their field experience to question popular stereotypes and perceptions about the Muslims. To debunk such images as the Muslim population in India is exploding, or that Hindu population is declining, or the women in the Muslim community are more oppressed than their Hindu counterpart, they focus on the existing gender-biases in society and the lack of women's autonomy. They point out, quite rightly, that attitudes, for example, towards family planning, are determined less by religious dictates and more by the appropriateness of the choices available to the women. Likewise, school drop-out rates are influenced more by the perceptions of the community and its sense of security/insecurity in the region than religious dogma.

The idea that variations in fertility rate or lower educational status is linked to class and community and the politics of the region are ideas that immediately appeal to the social science mind. But certain questions continue to linger. For instance, if women are all equally victims of patriarchy, why do we not see a spontaneous outflow of solidarity among them? Why do women who share this commonality nevertheless turn against each other during moments of communal tension? We know that Jats are an influential group and they have been able to exploit the resources available through the state. However, in a context where the Muslim community is being wooed by the political groups, why are they unable to even corner small benefits like locating a school closer to their locality?

In part these questions remain because we are missing the larger story about the nature of Indian politics, the mobilization of groups in competitive politics and the play of multiple identities. In the absence of this larger narrative, the simple opposition portrayed between Hindus and Muslims is unable to explain the diverse sites of discrimination and disadvantage that exist in society. Nevertheless their caution that even the district as a unit of analysis may be too large for meaningful explanation and that locally specific processes elude large-scale surveys needs careful consideration by all social scientists.

The book by Zaheer Baber is also a collection of three previously published essays. It too deals with aspects of the Hindu right, albeit not with its popular cultural form. The book focuses instead on the social writing and analysis that provided the intellectual fodder for this kind of thinking. The author concentrates on the works of T.N.Madan, Veena Das and

Ashis Nandy, people who are said to have led the charge on secularism and modernity. For Baber a major shortcoming of this school of thought is that they have abandoned "genuinely sociological analysis in favour of Indology where the actual behaviour of real living individuals is ignored and Hindu religious texts are valorized to construct the essence of what the Indian society is all about" (p.29). Drawing upon the experience of some other developing societies, such as Egypt, Baber argues that the rise of religious nationalism cannot simply be blamed on the sins of secularism. For one, the Indian state was never sufficiently secular, and two, religion, memory and history are always available as resources. Whether this resource is going to be used, or how it is going to be used, depends upon particular historical, political and economic conjunctures.

These are not new methodological insights but in the debate that has gone on around Hindu nationalism they are worth restating and reaffirming. The merit of both these books is that they invoke methods of inquiry that give social sciences its distinctive identity and analytical depth, and in reading them we come to recognize afresh the necessity of relating the general with the particular.■

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For Whom Do The Bells Toll?

Anamika

BEECH BAHAS MEIN SECULARWAD
Edited by Abhay Kumar Dubey
Lok-Chintan Granthmala, CSDS and Vani Publications, Delhi, 2005, pp. 502, Rs. 495.00

Religion stands on tiptoe in our land
Ready to pass to the American stand.
- Herbert, the Church Militant L.235

The lines quoted above were written at the beginning of the seventeenth century, but when we read them here in India today, the meaning spreads beyond the haze of the Protestant struggle in England. With hands in pocket it walks off to the lanes of Ayodhya and Godhra, still pock-marked with militant religiosity. The fear of Americanization, of being bulldozed into a cultural non-entity could have been one factor responsible for the onrush of fanatic assertions of 'Main Hoon Na'. But this unipolar globalization is not the only factor responsible for the communal tension here in India. India claims to be secular, but is accused of either the feminization of minorities or of the appeasement of Muslims (with the vote bank in mind). When I say 'feminization', I actually want to say, and as a woman it is my perception, that minorities are treated in India as yet another baby-woman, but gone are the days when baby-women quietly surrendered to your stick and carrot policies!

Modernity had tried its level best to wipe off the irrational highs and lows of religiosity from the face of the earth but all in vain. "If the rape becomes inevitable, just lie down and relax" — under the shadow of Confucian wisdom the critics of modernity seem to be saying here in the book: if you can't wash off religions, draw the paradigm of ethics from the existing religious models and build up a tolerant society, be a peace-activist and relax. Peaceful coexistence is still the mantra. But the advocates of secularism have their deep-seated fears: under the banner of secularism if the government can be so partisan, under the aegis of religiosity it'll definitely send the nation state to the dogs.

Religion has nothing more to fear than not being sufficiently understood. I don't know who wrote this but one of the prayers at school was;
So many gods, no many creeds—
So many paths that wind and wind
While just the art of being kind
Is all the sad world needs.

But who understands this, Professor Nandy? We have enough religions to make us hate, but not enough to make us love one another: "For virtue's self may too much zeal be had. / The worst of madman is a saint run mad", reminds Pope too. So, a safe distance is a must for the guardian forces or even the referee-forces hinted at by Professor Bhargava in his analogy to Ravi, the Idealist.

Critics of Secularism and the Post-Modern Secularwad. To Neitzsche this cosmos was a blind and stupid rage. For the post-modern secularists, technocrats, eco-feminists and computer wizards it is but a friend, our element and matrix, the beginning and the end, the gentle rocking of a great cosmic womb, a friendly flux from which we take our origin and to which we return, like the steady beat of ten thousand waves in the sea "Then the love of god means to learn how to dance or swim, to learn how to join in the cosmic play, to move with its rhythms and to understand that we … here just to play our part in the cosmic ballet" (John D. Caputo, *On Religion*, 2001).

And Caputo is not the only one to say so. Many techno-spiritual epics like Star War, Matrix, The Lord of The Rings, Harry Potter series and postmodern transcendentalists like Herman Hesse (*The Glass Bead Game*), Rushkoff (*Cyberia, Media Virus and Children of Chaos*) are beginning to expect that the material world is not just boringly susceptible to our own wills but may have secret laws and agendas of its own. De-divinizing their religions some of them say that god is no more or less than the cultural embodiment of our highest human values. Atheist priests and theologians are a set of Quantum Analysts who have managed to re-engineer their religions and faiths in the context of the information age and turn them into a different kind of 'performance art'.

Supporting the right to bring their own distinct traditions to the world carnival, Ruskoff and Sardar, for instance, regard the iconoclasm of their religions (the Jewish and the Islamic injunctions against idols and grave images) as a form of media literacy: a way of resisting and proposing alternatives to the expensive products of the cultural conglomerates, both inside and outside the West.

This also is some kind of a secularwad, if

you will! The dull thunder of approximate words like 'secular', like the thunder in the *Upanishad* (and also in *The Wasteland*) mutter things open to all kind of interpretations. Instead of offering you a flowchart determining different positions Indian scholars have adopted on secularism, I would rather suggest that you buy the book and see for yourself how truly democratic and dialogic the book is in its positioning of the major critics of secularism (Ashish Nandy, T.N. Madan and Partha Chatterjee) against the defenders like Javeed Alam and Rajeev Bhargava. The editor, one would note, doesn't play safe and 'secular' in the traditional sense of the term. He doesn't play god either by maintaining the right kind of distance from all and sundry. His tilt towards the defenders is explicit, and his critique of veteran secularists of the Hindi Public Sphere is rather sharp and fearless.

Specially insightful are Ravi Vasudevan's critique of secular modernism in Mani Ratnam's 'Bombay', Rajni Kothari's ardent analysis of hurdles in the path of secularism and his advocacy of the middle path, Dheerubhai Sheth's study of the Gujrat riots and Madhu Kishwar's dispassionate scanning of the controversial Shah Bano Case.

Rajeev Bhargava's article forms the heart of the text and like the heart of a brilliant debater, well trained in logistics, it throbs 'ding dong ding' — all set to brush off what veterans like Nandy, Madan and Partha have to say against the superficiality of the pompous paradigms of secularism in India. 'Duvidha main dhoondne gaye, maya mili na Ram', says a Hindi proverb. Stick to your Ram and Rahim, stick to the spiritual values promoted by your religious faiths —that is at least a shade better than operating in a spiritual vacuity and fighting over trifles. This would be an argument on the lines of Iqbal — 'Majhab nahin sikhata aapas mein bair rakhna!'. But, dear me, once institutionalized, gone for ever! Institutionalization of spiritual values into religion causes all the trouble as does the institutionalization of love into marriage! And once the bug bites, secular distancing is the only way out!.

Beech Bahas Main Secularwad. To talk of secularwad in the times of techno gods ruling the cosmic net is ironically meaningful. The modernist agenda of setting things right gets the contributors of the volume the cool halo of a board of doctors trying to analyse that crude lump of the Shylockean pound of flesh lying limp on the operation table. Some go to the root of the problem, some discuss the tissue and the textures, some take a broad view, some diagnose and prescribe. The goal is noble and the insights fine but the whole idea of deciphering the problem in a tone so grim and solemn throws us back to square one: for whom do the bells toll? The target readers are students, researchers and specialists on the subject. Only they would be bothered about the subtler nuances or the exact meaning of 'secularwad' and its multi-winged implications stretched across riots, court-cases, literature, films and translation industry.

Positing the critics of secularwad, against its articulate advocates it also traces out the new secular vision through sources as varied as Shah Bano's case, Gujarat riots, filming of the riots in 'Bombay' and the secularism-related discourses in the Hindu public sphere. Comprehensive and thorough, all-inclusive and super-serious, the volume is well-edited and well conceived, the editorial well researched. A first rate glossary, flawless translation and extensive footnoting try their best to make the volume approachable and reader-friendly but the concept itself is so fiercely 'loaded' that taking recourse to some postmodern editing techniques (snippets of cartoons, literary musings, flowcharts, quotes etc.) would have been a good idea.■

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Oddities of a State's Politics

Geeta Ramaseshan

CUT-OUTS, CASTE AND CINE STARS: THE WORLD OF TAMIL POLITICS
By Vaasanthi
Penguin Books, Delhi, 2006, pp.268, Rs. 425.00

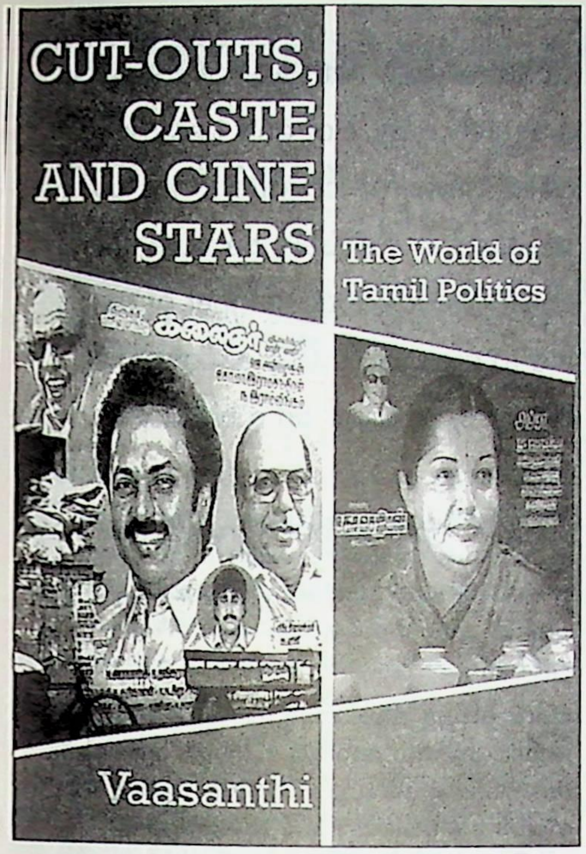
If you are looking for a serious academic work on the politics of Tamil Nadu you risk being disappointed. But if you want a bumpy roller coaster ride with sufficient chills and thrills at every turn then this is the book I recommend. The author herself narrates how horrified she was at the thought of writing an academic book when David Davidar approached her to write on the oddities of Tamil Nadu's politics.

Vaasanthi, writer, novelist and columnist was the editor of *India Today's* Tamil edition for nine years and is presently serving as a consultant to the magazine. But she lived outside the state for most of her life and hence regrets not having witnessed momentous periods in the history of Tamil Nadu. However, being an "occasional visitor" and not an "insider" in terms of living in the state, Vaasanthi brings to her writings a refreshing measure of clarity and objectivity.

To those living outside the state, Tamil Nadu politics is often confusing and full of contradictions. As a state it was the pioneer in addressing social inequality and was the first to introduce reservations almost fifty years ago. The demand for secession started in the 1930's but today the state is a major player in national politics. The Dravidian movement that attacked the caste system is now seen as having done more harm to the dalits. E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker or Periyar, the founder of the Self- Respect Movement and the leader of the Dravidian movement shunned hierarchy and held radical views on the institution of marriage and on the status of women. But these have been completely forgotten. What has emerged is subservience " reminiscent of medieval times. Jayalalithaa is hailed as *Theiva Tai*, Divine Mother, or *Thanga Thalaivi*, golden leader. Likewise, Karunanidhi is praised on public platforms by leaders young and old as a redeemer of the glory of Tamil culture and devoted to the progress of Tamil language." (introduction) The cut out culture, the larger than life leaders, the sway of script- writers, the domination of film stars on the political scene and the emergence of the leader cult make the politics of the state very different from the rest of India. "What is it that makes Tamil Nadu politics so different?" asks Vaasanthi and moves on to give a gripping narrative.

Starting with Periyar, she traces the beginnings of the Self Respect Movement, with its anti Brahmin, anti-Sanskrit stance, its stress on atheism and the movement's failure to hold its sway today. " Judging by the social realities of the day, Periyar was certainly a revolutionary with a very modern mind. Nobody till then had spoken so vociferously for women's freedom. But the DK has failed in the sense that it has not succeeded in reaching out to different sections of society and has not been able to project itself as something more than a very close circle of followers. Also, it has not been able to distance itself from the party that is in power" (p. 23).

The anti-Hindi agitation was major plank by which the DMK came to power. But this only isolated Tamil as a language and in the process ended up denying opportunities for young men and women to move elsewhere. Vaasanthi makes this point and explains the contradiction by quoting Periyar who had a



very different attitude to this language phobia. "Those who have no other means to survival invoke Tamil in order to survive. How can people who live in modern times be seized by this language madness? The madness over language is like the madness over caste and religion."

The period covered in the book was one of the most fascinating times. It was the time when stage plays and (subsequently) cinema were catching the imagination of the people. The DMK used this to very good effect for specific party propaganda and then created the biggest image of all, "the MGR myth—something no sociologist has been able to decipher" (p. 41). Vaasanthi tries to answer the phenomenon of a man who was a legend in his lifetime and who is now part of Tamil folkore.

Vaasanthi spares no one. Describing the functioning of the political parties she states, "Both Dravidian parties run along clearly drawn lines. There can be one leader and his or her command shall be obeyed. In spite of the façade of internal party democracy in the DMK, it is the leader's words that prevail in the end. In the AIADMK even the façade is missing." Attacks on the media with slamming of cases and assaults on journalists have always been a regular feature in the state. And the author has also had her shares of brushes with the two lead players in Tamil Nadu. She narrates her own experiences and the hate-hate relationship that the lead players have with the media. "MGR had the reputation of slapping reporters or catching them by the collar when incited and jailing them"(p. 154).

Vaasanthi is extremely candid and scathing in her comments and given the politics of Tamil Nadu it takes rare courage to write this way even if one does not live in the state! She does not hide her dislike for Jayalalithaa and is extremely caustic about her but does not spare Karunanidhi either. She describes the personal hatred that both have for each other thus. "Jayalalithaa's anger is directed against one person—Karunanidhi—and everything associated with him. To Karunanidhi the eighty year old seasoned politician, the name of the charismatic Brahmin woman from Karnataka is anathema. She has to save the party for herself and he has to save his for his son and political heir. It is this anger and enmity between two unequal foes that determines the present and future of the course of Tamil Nadu politics—there is no space for a third alternative—and none for any ideology inherited from Periyar. Ideology is usually the first casualty where everything boils down to protecting and saving one's skin. Or one's kin. It is this that determines the alliances made with the national parties. It is ironical that the history of a nation can be greatly influenced by the enmity between two regional leaders" (p. 173).

Other players and their politics also find their place. Describing Vaiko, she writes, "Vaiko's speeches carry both martial overtones and bombastic declarations. His call to the party workers is a battle cry: 'The battlefield is set, the army is alert, and the enemy is conquered. Let there be music of the conch!' His words seem lifted from the pages of mythology that Periyar spurned. A Sancho Panza tilting against imaginary windmills. Vaiko's secret admiration for Pirabakaran (the LTTE leader) must be an extension of a long nurtured boyish desire that he has not outgrown—to be tiger himself" (p. 122).

In her interview with the dalit leader Puthiya Thamizhagam Krishnaswamy, Vaasanthi skillfully draws the status of dalits. Tracing their status in other parts of India Krishnaswamy takes the position that the Dravidian movement has pushed the dalits in the rear. To quote, "Even ordinarily it is difficult for a woman to become a chief minister. But in UP a dalit woman has become a CM in an upper caste dominated society, and it is the largest state in India. Whereas in Tamil Nadu if a dalit is given any post, it would be the least important. In Karnataka, the home minister is a dalit. In Maharashtra the chief minister is a dalit. Can this ever happen here? Never! The Dravidian movement was essentially a movement of the backward class. The backward class in Tamil Nadu would rather kill than let a dalit rise" (p. 199). Balancing it with interviews of other scholars on the Dravidian movement the chapter and the subsequent ones address the rise of other castes and caste based parties like the PMK and their role in electoral politics. But was the reference to Krishnaswamy's colour and appearance necessary? "He is a dalit of the Pallar group that he calls 'Devendra Kula Vellars' but does not look like one. He is tall, well built and light complexioned, always in white giving you the impression that he has just returned from his morning walk" (p. 199).

The Dravidian movement that attacked the caste system is now seen as having done more harm to the Dalits. E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker or Periyar, the founder of the Self- Respect Movement and the leader of the Dravidian movement shunned hierarchy and held radical views on the institution of marriage and on the status of women.

The book has a very wide canvas and Vaasanthi paints it in vibrant hues. MGR's rise and resurrection, Jayalalithaa's foster son's wedding, Karunanidhi's arrest, the rise of the LTTE in Tamil Nadu, the fostering of alliances with the Congress and the BJP, the rise of religious beliefs among the political leaders who swore by atheism, cases of corruption, the intolerance of dissent all find a place in the book.

A large number of her sources are drawn from personal interviews with scholars, politicians and media persons including leaders of the major political parties and Vaasanthi quotes them extensively to prove her point. The strength of the book lies in its impressionist and anecdotal content. It does not follow the chronological order of events but that makes the reading more racy. But when she analyses academically she falters. For example, "the Dravidian movement's total rejection of all higher forms of religion led inevitably to the 'Sanskritizaion' of the masses which eminent sociologists speak off. When higher forms of religion were rejected, people went in for Karumari Amman, Adi Parasakthi and other local gods" (introduction). Such value judgments could have been avoided. On the whole a very readable book that captures the essence of the cut out, caste and film star politics of Tamil Nadu.■

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A Dialogue Between Two Dissenters

Harsh Sethi

TALKING INDIA: ASHIS NANDY IN CONVERSATION WITH RAMIN JAHANBEGLOO
Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2006, pp. 149, Rs 395.00

Ashis Nandy is no unfamiliar name. His contrarian positions on a range of issues – even sati, have continued to intrigue, if not irritate many of his readers. He is also, as he claims, consistently misunderstood. Take his writings following the infamous case of the Deorala sati. When most commentators were railing against the barbarous custom, arguing for the use of state force to root out a heinous practice, Ashis Nandy chose to defend the idea of sati, even while denouncing the specific instance at Deorala as murder. The fine distinction was lost on most readers, missing his critique of urban middle class moralizing about the beliefs and cultural credos of the marginalized as a defence of the custom. But then, 'most urban, modern, educated Indians see their diversity as a source of national disunity – of communalism, casteism, regionalism, parochialism and factionalism.' Nandy, basing his understanding of our possible futures on 'persons and communities who insist on living with "unreliable" and "invalid histories", who live with selves that originate and are grounded in ahistorical modes of constructing the past – in legends, myths and epics', can appear a little quaint, if not reactionary. That, I believe, would be an error.

Conversations with Nandy, though fun, are rarely easy. Not only because so many of his views run counter to the dominant positions, but equally because of his non-linear, if not elliptic manner of responding to questions. Also disconcerting is his tendency to draw on a bewildering range of sources – from the latest in psychoanalysis, opinion poll surveys, epic literature to social science theorizing. It is to the credit of Ramin Jahanbegloo, Iranian philosopher and cultural critic that what may have been intended as interviews have been transformed into a conversation – a dialogue between two dissenters, each drawing upn the legacies of their rich, and troubled, civilizations. The result is a peek into the minds and ways of thinking of two creative individuals, engaged with both their own evolution as also their take on some of the most troubling questions of the times. Adding poignancy to the dialogue is the fact that Ramin Jahanbegloo, the 2006 Rajni Kothari Fellow at the CSDS, is currently lodged in an Iranian prison on unspecified charges.

At a time when dominant political and intellectual elites seem to have acquiesced in the inevitability of globalization and bought into the hegemonic narratives of nationalism, secularism, patriarchal science and cultural universalism, and seek to mould their countries into the image of the modern West, this book represents a valiant plea for a process of mutual learning in cultures, of the need to be sceptical of all homogenization projects and, above all, to be sensitive to the sources of violence embedded in modern development. And yet, neither Nandy nor Jahanbegloo are anti-West in the conventional sense. What they are pleading for is an idea of plurality, one that 'ensures the act of dissent as a decent way of life'.

Each of the five rubrics under which the conversations are organized: 'An Indian Childhood', 'Looking in the Mirror of the East', 'Tradition and Modernity', 'The Idea of India', and 'Is India a Postmodern Culture?' touches too many themes to permit an easy rendition. Yet, no matter what the specifics of the theme, both Nandy and Jahanbegloo continually veer back to their over-riding concern – the place for ostensibly 'defeated' people and cultures in the modern world, one increasingly shaped by the modern West.

This, in both India and Iran, two ancient civilizations may seem strange. After all, did not our leaders, claim to be constructing another path? And yet, as we embarked upon our modern state and nation-building projects, we seem to have given up on precisely those sets of values and attributes that helped us survive as cultures when other societies went under. Today both India and Iran, and Hinduism and Islam appear shrunk, facing a loss of confidence as they seek to become proper nation-states. Even as they seek to demarcate themselves from others by stressing their own particularities, they serve to diminish the diversity within.

It is not just religious but secular states too which display the loss of confidence. In Iran, after the Khomeini revolution, it may be easier to understand the official ire against anyone espousing beliefs other than those officially sanctioned. Yet, in India too, despite Nandy protesting that 'I am not a product of village India. Nor am I a believer. I'm a child of the modern age. I feel comfortable with critical rationality; my writings are proof of that' – both his 'anti-secularist manifesto' and his book on *The Illegitimacy of Nationalism* generated howls of protest. Is it, as he remarks, that our

Conversations with Nandy, though fun, are rarely easy. Not only because so many of his views run counter to the dominant positions, but equally because of his non-linear, if not elliptic manner of responding to questions. Also disconcerting is his tendency to draw on a bewildering range of sources – from the latest in psychoanalysis, opinion poll surveys, epic literature to social science theorizing.

modernizing elites have managed to convert secularism into another religious orthodoxy, this while simultaneously denouncing the traditional believers and the devout?

For Nandy, the great exemplars remain Tagore and Gandhi, this despite the many differences in their approach to many critical questions, in particular science. Yet, both retained immense respect for the other. A little-known fact that Nandy alludes to is that Tagore wanted Gandhi to assume responsibility for Shantiniketan after his death. The exchanges between the two, as also between Gandhi and C.F. Andrews, which also Nandy periodically brings up, provides interesting insights into the complex persona of Gandhi and why it would be erroneous to classify him as a simplistic anti-modernizer. But more, it alerts us to possibilities within our modern public discourse that we can seek to build on in constructing a politics of resistance.

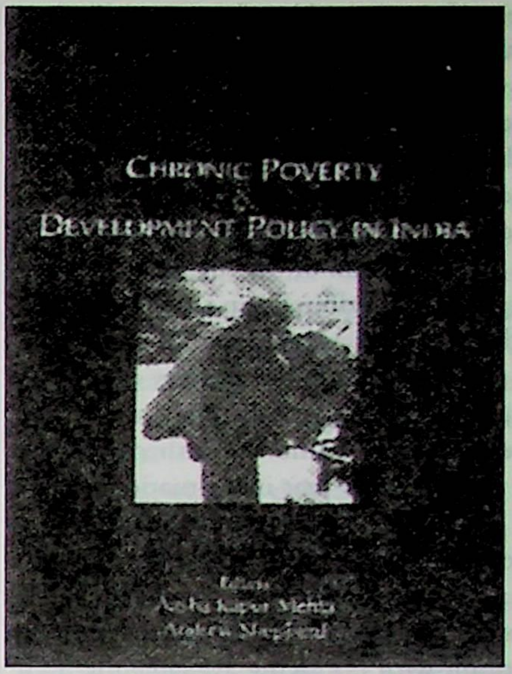
Conversations, when not self-obsessed and stilted monologues are both dialogic and open-ended, leaving open the promise of continuing conversation in subsequent encounters. On this the book delivers. Where it disappoints is in failing in sufficiently bringing Ramin Jahanbegloo to the fore. Nothing in this book, for instance, provides us a clue as to why the present Iranian regime sees him as a threat, surely not just because as a liberal philosopher he is suspicious of all hegemonie ideologies. Equally, it would have been fascinating, particularly for an Indian reader, to learn how a liberal Iranian, one while proud of his civilizational legacy refuses to pander to an anti-West sentiment understands and engages with the convulsions his country is going through. From the authoritarian modernization and secularization under the Shah to the stultifying orthodoxy of Khomeni is a traumatic transition, one that we in India need to think about. A genuine cross-cultural exchange should have left us wiser about both countries. That, possibly, may need another encounter.■

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Putting Poverty on the Table

Duvvuri Subbarao

CHRONIC POVERTY AND DEVELOPMENT POLICY IN INDIA
Edited by Aasha Kapur Mehta and Andrew Shepherd
Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2006, pp.411, Rs.720.00



Two hundred years after Adam Smith wrote the *Wealth of Nations*, Gunnar Myrdal produced his seminal work on the *Poverty of Nations*. This is ironic for, in the intervening two centuries, the world shifted not from wealth to poverty but the other way round. The agriculture, industrial and scientific revolutions heralded unprecedented improvements in material well-being and social indicators. But the gains were so uneven that even as large parts of the world enjoyed remarkable prosperity, mass poverty continues to be a complex and compelling challenge in much of the Third World.

Within the Third World itself there has been an extraordinary diversity of experience in reducing poverty with some remarkable successes and some dismal failures. This record of experience has expanded our understanding of the causes and consequences of poverty, but it has also thrown up more questions than answers. Why do some policies work and some don't? Why do policies that work in a certain context or in a certain country not work in another? Why do the same policies produce dramatically different results in different settings and situations?

An important lesson of experience, and indeed one of the few definitive ones is that poverty is too complex, multifaceted and multidimensional to respond to boiler plate and 'one size fits all' solutions. Even as the challenge can be framed in simple and straightforward terms – providing poor households a permanent exit out of poverty – the solutions have necessarily to be complex, context specific and depend on answers to questions such as who are the poor, where do they live, what do they do, what opportunities do they have and how do they respond to them.

The book under review, *Chronic Poverty and Development Policy in India* is relevant and important in the context of the above problematique. Its central message is that poverty is not a homogenous problem and the poor are not a homogenous group. Redressing chronic poverty requires special focus and possibly different interventions. The chronically poor are people who remain poor for much or all of their lives, pass on their poverty to their children and all too often die preventable deaths. Chronic poverty is more than just deeper poverty. Making permanent and irreversible exit out of poverty is evidently more difficult for the chronically poor. They benefit the least from economic growth and development, and are likely to remain poor even if the Millennium Development Goal of reducing poverty by half by 2015 is achieved. Policies and programmes aimed at reducing poverty in general are necessary; but by themselves, they are not sufficient to reduce chronic poverty. The chronically poor need more than just expanding economic opportunities to escape poverty. They need targeted support, social assistance, social protection and inclusive strategies.

This book is actually a collection of papers which were first presented at a seminar on Chronic Poverty and Development Policy in India organized by the Chronic Poverty Research Centre in November 2003. There are altogether eleven papers – six of them addressing the nature of chronic poverty in India, one paper dealing with politics of chronic poverty and the last four papers devoted to an analysis of poverty reducing policy from a chronic poverty perspective. And like any compendium of this type, the papers are of variable quality and uneven depth.

The book contains a lot of scholarship; it contains a lot of guff as well. There is nothing in the book by way of pathbreaking research or startling findings. But that perhaps was not to be expected as poverty is such an intensively studied topic. At the same time, some of the papers contain new insights that challenge our stereotype views. There is a finding, for example, that the number of scheduled castes (SC) and scheduled tribes (ST) households that escaped poverty over the last 25 years is larger than the number of non-SC, non-ST households. It is not clear if this is because there were more poor SC/ST households than poor non-SC/ST households to start with or because SC/ST households had better opportunities, say because of affirmative action.

There is also the finding, again counter-intuitive, that the incidence of poverty is higher in larger villages and villages with better infrastructure. The explanation offered for this is that villages with better infrastructure also attract poor migrants thereby increasing the incidence of poverty in the village. Thus better infrastructure attracts the poor, and also helps reduce poverty over time.

Some research findings reported in the papers are inane, and serve at best to reinforce our heuristic views. For example findings that the incidence of poverty is higher among larger households and among casual labour or that higher illiteracy, possession of assets and proximity to an urban centre are all negatively correlated with poverty are standard fare.

In the paper on the politics of chronic poverty, N.C.B. Nath puts forward some revealing findings. According to him, there are few perceptible differences between states which have reduced poverty faster than the average and those which have reduced poverty slower than the average in the 1990s. Political empowerment, the inclusion of SCs and lower caste in state coalition regimes does not appear to have made a difference. There was also no significant correlation between the ideologies of parties in office in state governments and success or lack of it in poverty reduction. While these findings are interesting and indeed perplexing, Nath's proposition that regional parties appeal to the poor more than national parties is questionable going by the evidence of the several electoral verdicts across the country.

The book has some shortcomings by way of both omission and commission. First, the focus on chronic poverty as distinct from general poverty is not uniform across all the papers. Several papers use the phrase chronic poverty but the content or the findings have no relevance exclusive to chronic poverty. This by itself is not a major flaw but can be a disap-

An important lesson of experience, and indeed one of the few definitive ones, is that poverty is too complex, multifaceted and multidimensional to respond to boiler plate and 'one size fits all' solutions.

pointment if one is looking for a specialized understanding of chronic poverty.

Second, even as the introductory chapter stresses the multidimensional deprivation that causes chronic poverty, the papers put together address only the political and economic dimensions to the exclusion of other disciplines. There is no discussion of the sociology of chronic poverty – a dimension that is important both to understand the nature of chronic poverty and the type of anti-poverty intervention required. There is, for example, no reference to the 'accommodation theory of mass poverty' which posits that in a situation of extreme deprivation, the poor are very poorly motivated to improve their lot. At levels of living far below subsistence, any and all increases in income are used up entirely towards consumption with no saving available for investment rendering any substantial economic improvement hopelessly impossible. Because the chances of success in escaping poverty are so slim, the poor do not even try; they simply acquiesce in their current state of poverty. The challenge of reducing chronic poverty then also includes cracking this acquiescence.

Another lacuna of the book is its thematic incompleteness. The received wisdom today is that the strategy for attacking poverty should have three critical pillars. The first pillar is expanding opportunities for the poor to raise their incomes. The second pillar is enhancing security by reducing poor people's vulnerability to adversities such as ill-health, economic shocks, crop failures, natural disasters and violence. The third pillar of an anti-poverty strategy is facilitating empowerment by making state institutions more accountable and responsive to poor people, strengthening the participation of the poor in political processes and in decentralized decisions making. The papers in the book address the first two pillars but treatment of the third pillar, empowerment, is quite weak.

The authors of the papers include some of our renowned economists such as Professor M.S. Swaminathan and Professor R. Radhakrishna as well as some relatively young researchers. While the papers by the senior economists predictably live up to their reputations, what is refreshing is that even some of the younger authors have produced high quality research.

This book is by no means exhaustive in its treatment of chronic poverty; neither does it have a neat story line. But the editors make only a modest, nevertheless important, objective for the book which is to put chronic poverty on the table as a subject for further research. On this objective, they have succeeded eminently.■

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Population is about People

A. K. Shiva Kumar

WE THE BILLION: A SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON INDIA'S POPULATION
By Ragini Sen
Sage Publications, Delhi, 2003, pp.324, Rs.640.00

A rapidly rising population in any society can potentially exert severe pressures on the environment, on social and physical infrastructure, and on public services essential for decent living. Particularly in a context of resource constraints, very high rates of population growth can adversely affect even the carrying capacity of the planet. When India's population crossed a billion, it caused unnecessary alarm and anxiety among many. There is no 'population bomb' waiting to explode. Recent demographic data confirm a slowing down in India's population growth rates across all states; and some 8 states and Union Territories have already reached a Total Fertility Rate of 2.1—the natural replacement rate. At the same time, however, it is also true that in several states and regions within India women have no choice and little control over fertility decisions. As a result, they end up bearing more children than they desire. Understanding and analysing the absence of choice and freedoms to exercise that choice are fundamental to the formulation of effective population policies and programmatic interventions. Reducing birth rates and fertility require a deeper understanding of human poverty and deprivation, women's autonomy and freedom to make choices, child survival and family decision making processes and provisioning of and access to reproductive health services. These vital aspects of the population question are seldom explored in any depth by alarmists who believe that 'population control' is the best solution.

Sen's book *We the Billion* examines several dimensions of the population question. How can India move rapidly forward to achieve population stabilization? This is the central issue that she addresses in her book. Experts discussing approaches to population stabilization fall into two categories. In the first category are those who advocate strict laws limiting the number of children a family can have, enforcing penalties and adopting coercive measures to reduce birth rates. In the second and undoubtedly sensible category are those who advocate humane approaches to population stabilization. Such approaches tend to recognize the dignity of human beings, women in particular, and rely on empowering women, promoting education, expanding the reach of reproductive health services, meeting unmet need for contraception, raising the age at marriage, improving birth spacing and enhancing child survival. It is a relief to see that Sen belongs to the second camp of those who promote cooperation and empowerment, not legislation and coercion to lower fertility rates.

Population is about people, not numbers. This central premise, Sen argues, is often lost in policy discussions surrounding the population issue. As a result, the focus of policy attention tends to be on sterilization targets and curtailing the number of births. Policy formulation, she argues, would benefit if health-illness, corporeity and cultures were treated as interlinked. She calls for policies that go beyond population 'control' and depend on greater empowerment and autonomy for women. Population stabilization, she asserts, should not be treated as a single isolated issue. Integrated into any such population policy should be efforts to eliminate dowry and to promote female literacy as both impact the birth and survival particularly of the girl child. She argues for correcting imbalances in the sex ratio that are now skewed against girls. Equally important, Sen points out that birth rates have little to do with religion or caste. She questions the myth that minorities have more children by asking why this is not necessarily true of Kerala and Tamil Nadu – or of wealthier families belonging to minority communities. Surprisingly however, Sen does not situate the discussion explicitly within the context of rights and justice. While this is implied in the position taken by her, the arguments lack the backing of moral and ethical reasoning without strong reference to reproductive rights of women, the follow-up to the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo, and the recent contribution of rights activists to push for a humane population policy.

Sen brings a refreshing intellectual dimension to the policy debates surrounding population by introducing a social psychological perspective. She argues that fertility decisions are often supraindividual and are influenced by many societal practices and conventions. She makes a strong case for recognizing the importance of social and cultural factors in influencing fertility choices and decisions. For instance, solutions proposed for reducing fertility such as delayed age at marriage or improved spacing of children or even eliminating discrimination

against the girl child cannot simply be realized by generating awareness or enacting laws. These require changes in mind-sets and behaviour patterns that do not come about easily. Social communication therefore becomes extremely crucial; and Sen devotes considerable space in the book to critically analyse the role of mass media and various communication strategies adopted by India.

The chapters in the book offer the reader useful background material on population trends, the evolution of India's population policies and the dimensions of a communication policy. They provide a lucid and critical analysis of posters and other materials used to propagate the population message. Two chapters are devoted to developing a theoretical framework for analysis and establishing a case for a composite approach termed '*representations sociale*'. While this is necessary and makes ample sense, the language and jargon are particularly difficult to digest. Chapter 3, for instance, opens with this rather strangely constructed sentence. "In this chapter the social representational approach, a 'modern day anthropology' which emphasizes the 'philosophia plebia', in contrast to the elite, 'reified' universe of discourse represented by variations of the 'Bostonian pundits' is presented." Similarly, Chapter 4 entitled 'The Holy Trinity' begins thus: "The chapter: (i) discusses the mind-body nexus and argues the need to go beyond the Cartesian dualism when dealing with fertility issues; (ii) suggests that representations of fertility, corporeity (body) and health-illnesses are interlinked; (iii) demonstrates that social representations play a central role in fertility behaviour and are affected by not only 'objective' and 'scientific' information but by cultural factors. Cultural factors not only affect perception and behaviour but also communication; and (iv) argues that given these social facts, any policy which is related to reproductive health and population stabilization should take cultural factors into account." Sen also revels in highlighting dichotomies that are not always helpful. To illustrate, the book has sections titled quantitative vs. qualitative research, collective representations vs. social representations, consensual vs. reified universe, transformative vs. informative processes, socio-cultural vs. empirical and so on. While some of the comparisons are useful, many are somewhat vague and unnecessary as lines of demarcation get blurred. Other disturbing features of the book are grammatical errors, use of graphs that are not properly annotated and sweeping statements that cry for justification.

Sen presents the results of field work in Lucknow that she carried out in 1987 and 1988 to understand the soft psychological variables and the social representations of fertility-related issues. This chapter is rich in content with several narratives offering explanations and people's responses to the nature of health services provided, the quality of care, the effectiveness of messages and the concept of mortality. It contains useful discussions on decision making within the household, marriage decisions for boys and girls, representation of menstruation, sexual behaviours, pregnancy, sterility, son preference, and characterization of women. The next chapter dramatically and quite needlessly titled 'Exhume the Killing Fields' discusses the practice of female foeticide and infanticide in parts of India. Sen ends the book on a practical note by drawing lessons from the experiences of Kerala and Tamil Nadu. In doing so, she strongly emphasizes the importance of integrating communication and media strategies into population policies. She makes a case for developing district-level communication and health strategies for population stabilization. Ultimately, however, Sen contends that success is a function of political commitment and public action.

Sen's book makes useful reading. Two features are particularly attractive. One is the strong people-centred position the author takes in advocating a humane and moral approach to population stabilization. The second and equally significant contribution of the book is to underscore the significance of effective communication for addressing several social and cultural constraints affecting people's bahaviours.

The population debate in India is full of myths and misconceptions. But one thing is for sure. It is time to stop counting people and begin counting on people. There is no quick solution to the population issue. Reducing birth rates is not a technical problem with a technical solution. Caught in the complex web of moral, ethical and emotional discussions, policymakers and many concerned citizens often fail to recognize the many interconnections between population growth and well-being of the individual, family and society. Sen rightly calls for recognizing the centrality of people, their participation and active engagement in accelerating India's population stabilization. For every society, people are the real wealth of a nation. Urgent public action is needed to eliminate human poverty, reduce child deaths, enrich the quality of reproductive health care, enlarge contraception choices, and empower women. Only by enhancing people's capabilities can India rapidly stabilize its population while simultaneously accelerating growth and human development.■

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Trade Versus Environmental Divide

Bibek Debroy

THE WTO AND INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL LAW: TOWARDS CONCILIATION
By Anupam Goel
Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2006, pp.xxvi+424, Rs. 695.00

The WTO's website states the following. "Issues relating to trade, the environment and sustainable development more generally, have been discussed in the GATT and in the WTO for many years. Environment is a horizontal issue that cuts across different rules and disciplines in WTO. The issue has been considered by Members both in terms of the impact of environmental policies on trade, and of the impact of trade on the environment." Yes, indeed. Before the Stockholm Conference in 1972, the GATT Secretariat prepared a study in 1971 on "Industrial Pollution Control and International Trade", flagging what today would be called green protectionism. The Group on Environmental Measures and Trade (EMIT) was also set up in 1971, although it did not meet for 20 years. But there were several reasons why the environment was becoming important as an issue. First, Article XX of GATT had in any case allowed exceptions on grounds on protecting the environment. Second, the Tokyo Round (1973-79) led to the agreement on technical barriers to trade (TBT) and the Uruguay Round (1986-94) contributed an agreement on sanitary and phytosanitary measures (SPS), apart from environmental clauses in agreements on agriculture, subsidies and countervailing measures, intellectual property and services, not to speak of the Preamble to the WTO agreement.

Third, there was the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987, leading to the Brundtland Report (which made sustainable development a fashionable expression) and the UN Conference on Environment and Development in 1992 (the Earth Summit). Fourth, within GATT, there was a Working Group on the Export of Domestically Produced Goods and Other Hazardous Substances. Fifth, since 1995, there has been the Committee on Trade and Environment (CTE), following the Ministerial Declaration in 1994. Sixth, in 1991, the tuna-dolphin dispute between Mexico and the United States was taken to GATT, the first of several such disputes on gasoline, shrimp-turtle and several other environment-related disputes. Seventh, there are several multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), thus raising questions of compatibility between MEAs and WTO's rules and jurisprudence. Eighth, at the Doha (2001) Ministerial Conference, the CTE was instructed to focus on three specific aspects – the effects of environmental measures on market access, relevant provisions of the TRIPs (trade-related intellectual property rights) agreement and labelling requirements for environmental purposes. This was paragraph 32 of the Doha Ministerial Declaration. In addition, there was paragraph 31, setting out parameters for some limited negotiations on trade and the environment – relationship between WTO rules and MEAs (without prejudicing the rights of a WTO member not a party to a specific MEA), procedures for information exchanges between MEA Secretariats and WTO Committees and reduction or elimination of tariffs and NTBs (non-tariff barriers) to environmental goods and services.

This is the broad background for this comprehensive book on WTO and international environmental law. There are eight chapters, with a good introduction (not counted as a separate chapter). Chapter 1 is a historical sketch, outlining the evolution of WTO, global environmental problems, notions of sustainable development and the conflict between domestic environment protection objectives and GATT/WTO principles. This is a lawyer's book, written by a law academic, and is therefore strong on the legal aspects. Chapter 2 accordingly moves on to issues concerning non-Party States, meaning WTO signatories who are not signatories to various MEAs. This is terrain that would normally not be covered by an economist writing on trade and the environment. Chapter 3 is on process and production-based (PPMs) environmental measures and their reconciliation with GATT/WTO's non-discrimination principle. The aforementioned Article XX of GATT permits exceptions to GATT principles on grounds of protecting the environment. These are examined in Chapter 4, which is heavy on jurisprudence. Chapter 5 examines the financial assistance provisions under the Montreal Protocol and its implications for the subsidies and countervailing measures (SCM) agreement. Chapter 6 brings in TRIPs and the Convention on Biological Diversity. These chapters are all in the nature of a comprehensive review, if the sub-title of "Towards Conciliation" is borne in mind. This reconciliation issue is examined in Chapter 7, through the Rules of Treaty interpretation of the Vienna Convention. And finally, one ends with the concluding chapter (Chapter 8) which argues that there is no inherent conflict between trade and concern for the environment. Nor do GATT/WTO rules need to be changed in order to accommodate environmental trade provisions of MEAs. While this argument is the core thesis of the book, the argument cannot really be spelt out in brief. One ought to read the book. Having said this, it is also necessary to mention that this reviewer is not convinced about this argument. Here is what the introductory chapter has to say about this particular argument. "Chapter 8 is the conclusion, which dispenses with the need of any cumbersome process of amendment or waiver of GATT/WTO rules in face of MEAs and brings out the fact, that an objective, prudent, and unbiased approach to interpretation can allow the harmonization of the international trade law and those of environmental law for the benefit of humankind."

An extremely rich book on law and jurisprudence. Any economist writing on the issue would however have spent much more time on what constitutes only three small sections in the introductory chapter. Section III is on "extreme pro-trade views and their evaluation". The interpretation of extreme pro-trade views is the following. "Free traders feel that if a country's environmental resources are correctly priced, liberal trade improves the country's overall welfare and leads to a more efficient use of natural resources. Therefore, increased economic growth stimulates the demand for environmental protection, generates additional income to pay for it which in turn leads to improved environmental standards." This is an accurate statement. The problem is with the evaluation assertion. For instance, the tragedy of commons literature, cited as a counter-argument to the free trade assertion, is actually an argument for internalizing the costs of negative externalities through appropriate prices and property rights. It is in this sense that the author is less than fair to the free trade argument, which is often also a developing country argument. First, the imposition of similar standards on both developing and developed countries, as is sometimes attempted, is patently unfair, especially when one remembers the historical backlog of emissions that industrialized countries contributed in their process of economic growth. Second, while environmental degradation may be a public bad, the shadow price imposed should be a sovereign decision. If 38% of the population in Bhutan does not have access to improved water sources, should Bhutan worry about providing water or about air pollution that might conceivably

contribute to cardiovascular diseases? If 47% of Nepal's children (under the age of 5) are underweight, should Nepal worry about feeding them properly or about carbon dioxide emissions? Should government expenditure focus on primary education, rural health care and rural infrastructure, or on improving the environment? Priorities and objective functions change as economies develop and the best option before developed countries to further the cause of the environment is through opening up markets in developed countries. Markets in developed countries are not open. Agriculture and textiles and garments are two obvious instances, characterized by quotas, high tariffs, tariff escalation and specific duties that convert to high ad valorem equivalents. In addition, faced with disciplines on tariffs, policy substitution takes place by resorting to non-tariff barriers through anti-dumping and anti-subsidy investigations. Not only are markets not open, they are further closed by using the bogey of the environment and the notion of sustainable development, an extremely difficult notion to pin down. The Brundtland Report told us that there are more than 60 possible definitions of sustainable development. Of these, the preferred one defines sustainable development as "satisfying present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". This is not a very satisfactory definition. Present needs can reasonably be defined and quantified. Future needs are impossible to anticipate. Anticipation of the ability of future generations to meet these needs is even more difficult.

Be that as it may, Section IV of the introductory chapter now turns to the views of environmentalists, stated as, "Environmentalists argue that the environment represents a higher-order concern than trade… The environmental community is fearful that international trade will magnify the effects of poor environmental policies in the world." In essence, this is a case for regulation, as opposed to price-based resource allocation, and is an argument the author is sympathetic to. An argument is then developed in Section V that there is a convergence across these two points of view. Notwithstanding the points made about market failure, this hypothesis about convergence probably overstates the case. In all probability, had it been an economist writing, the preference would have been for price-based allocation and there would also have been instances of regulatory failure. Despite law and economics coming together, the convergence in focus is unlikely to ever happen and that is equally true of the free trade versus environmentalist divide. Nevertheless, a very good book on an important subject.■

Bibek Debroy is Secretary General of the PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry and is an economist.

Basis of Good Economics

Anil K. Kanungo

DEVELOPMENT WITH DIGNITY: A CASE FOR FULL EMPLOYMENT
By Amit Bhaduri
National Book Trust, Delhi, 2005, pp. x+107, Rs. 45.00

In a social party, or in the circuit of savvy politicians, celebrities, intellectual elites (not to mention what kind of), big corporates, policy makers or whizkids of the new economy, there is one statement making the rounds, when one is running out of conversation: "The Indian economy is doing very well. Consistently registering a growth rate of 7 or 7.5 is amazing and we can even do 10, is what the general feeling among these tribes is all about. Thanks to reforms and emergence of free market."

Such candid expressions also in public places have influenced or continue to influence even now the minds of the children of the lesser god—the common Indians. The urban elite or the affluent class (referring to the above composition) reasserts itself by advocating that speedy liberalization and open market is the only answer to the country's overall growth, and development and eradication of long-time social malaise like poverty. Such repeated noises to which the "State" is also a party today symbolize mainstream India.

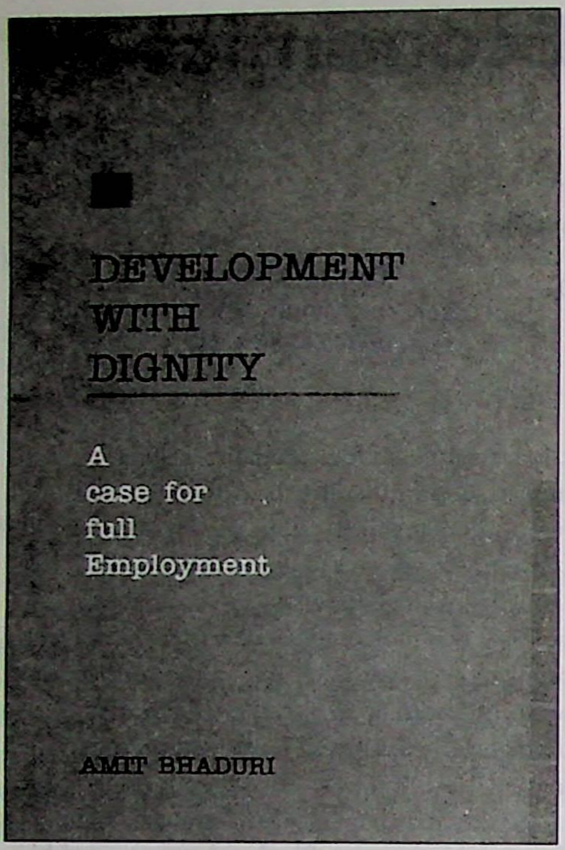
Whereas, some who are sensitive and in touch with the ground realities or even associated at the grassroot level and have still in them a sense of idealism and belief in realism are aghast to notice how unreal this world is. They are often confronted with the question, "Do they (the class mentioned above) represent the real India?"

Idealists or evangelists are not an extinct species, they are very much part of the state, participate in the democratic functioning of the state and voice their genuine concerns towards major societal policy failures and try to put up a set of alternative proposals through their teaching, writing or public speaking. One such idealist is Professor Amit Bhaduri, a renowned, prolific economic theoretician of this country, who has drawn up a set of proposals to evolve a larger economic strategy which can bring to its people "development with dignity." While delineating an alternative strategy, he also tries to bring back the seriousness and glory of the very discipline—Economics, which seems to have lost some amount of its dignity in the wake of frenzied pursuits of globalization with the flaunting of ostentation of nouveau riche and the direction that it is taking for promoting an imbalanced growth strategy.

If the basic objective of good economics is to create wealth and look after the welfare of human kind in totality, then Bhaduri's this recent monograph has done justice to the concept. He goes on to argue that a well thought out economic strategy backed by political reasoning and social harmony can still bring about a radical change in the country in terms of fostering an alternative path of development despite all its systemic shortcomings.

In the first chapter, 'Development with Dignity: No Utopia', Bhaduri has expressed his humiliation of being part of a state, which after six decades of independence has not been able to eradicate one of the ghastly old scourges of mankind—poverty. He holds the state responsible for not pursuing the right policy for attaining a higher human development index. A state's rigorous pursuit of achieving higher growth, he feels, simply cannot uplift the country from its subsistence level. The process of growth needs to be backed by an in-built mechanism of promoting income distribution through the process of growth itself. It is therefore important not to separate growth from distribution. Both need to be integrated as parts of the same process. A developmental process that one should strive for must take into account the integration of these two critical aspects, at the same time trying to break the social barriers of discrimination and prejudice based on religion, gender, language, caste, creed, etc. It's no utopia, according to him, all it needs is sound economics backed by full participation of all citizens.

Neo liberalists today believe that the market will take care of everything. Left to itself the market will determine what is good for the individual and the country as a whole. Their assumption that the market can tackle all societal problems effectively and efficiently is somewhat unrealistic, argues Bhaduri in 'Market Succeeds and Fails'. He believes that the market on most occasions would fail, because it produces a variety of goods or services which only a limited section of the society can afford or avail. Market participants today are a particular class of consumers who have sufficient purchasing power to interact with the market at regular intervals and, they all live in the major cities. Then one may ask, what about people living in remote areas? Has the market in a decade and half ever addressed the



basic issues that these people are confronted with? He is of the opinion that to pretend or to have a blind faith in the market that the basic needs of these people would be met "in due course" with the efficient functioning of the "liberalized market forces" sounds unreasonable or absurd. However one may believe, in today's globalized world it may not be proper anymore to debate whether a dynamic market or a state has the entire responsibility of providing the basic needs to the people. Each institution has its unique place and shared responsibility in terms of fulfilling its objectives. In a country like India, there is a need for the state to assume direct responsibility of guaranteeing the basic needs like food, drinking water, shelter, clothing, etc. for the masses. It should not be mandatory for the state to follow either pro or contra market policies. Instead efforts should be made to devise policies where the two institutions reinforce each other for bringing political and economic democracy closer. This participatory interaction will form the basis of charting out a path of economic development to secure dignity for all citizens.

Bhaduri has expressed his lament over the fact that Indian society is still suffering from religious obscurantism. The major political party even today sometimes does arouse public feelings through its religious agenda. It has not fully learnt the lesson that Indian society cannot be always susceptible to religious sentiments.

Today the issue of nationalism is exploited purely for vested interests. Economic liberalization and globalization have not been able to establish the economic content to the issue of nationalism. Observing it as a political device to come to power has disallowed the citizens of any economic benefit. Nationalism will be hollow without any economic content. *Development with Dignity* tries to define this economic content and make this concept workable.

The current emphasis on the Government's policy of promoting export and attaining global competitiveness has drawn flak from Bhaduri. Cutting costs, utilizing foreign direct investment for export promotion and dependence on technology, he says, may give you a global competitive edge, but it doesn't address the issue of national priority, i.e., expanding the home market horizontally so as to create job opportunity for fellow citizens. He feels that the country cannot just simply bask in celebration of raising exports and becoming globally competitive.

Bhaduri has gone overboard here. His discomfort over the Government's current over emphasis on export led growth and attainment of global competitiveness seems to be unreasonable. In times when global competition and open trade are the order of the day, where opportunities are seamless, capitalizing on those opportunities according to one's strength or core competence whether through exports, or through intellectual capital or by attaining competitiveness should be welcome and appreciated (examples: professional services, BPO, IT). After all, increasing a country's share in world trade is vital as it can avert any future financial crisis, and more importantly, can be utilized for its basic infrastructural needs. Especially in today's time not to follow such policies wholeheartedly or not to exploit one's own potential where one has comparative advantage will prove dear.

What is essential is to achieve an appropriate mix of domestic and export demand and utilize the dynamics of foreign trade for the benefit of the poor. Framing of policy mix is therefore crucial. The idea is not to leverage only the global competitiveness of the country, but to ensure minimum legal wage to all citizens with a sense of producing socially productive work. This can be achieved when the decision making power is decentralized and given to the local bodies at the village or town level with required financial resources.

The argument that 'The Government can't do it' in the last chapter throws up interesting insights into the whole perspective of how the government is not in a position to undertake the best possible action needed to provide full employment or to create an atmosphere of "development with dignity". The Government admits that it has no money and it has to look to outside resources for running the state. In that case, the Government argues that it ends up borrowing more from organizations like the World Bank and IMF and its debt resource increases. One may not agree with this view. One can always look at it from a different angle and say that in a country where large amounts of unutilized resources, unsold food grains, hefty foreign reserves and huge unemployed labour coexist, the government can utilize the foreign reserves in an imaginative manner to create infrastructure and generate employment. The idea is to galvanize new policies by which the state becomes financially empowered to take care of full employability.

In a democratic country like India, the Right to Information holds immense importance, therefore strict enforcement of it is required at all levels of the Government's activities, especially in the process of decentralizing the financial and decision making powers to local bodies. With this, the poor and the needy ones will be in a position to know how much financial resources have been earmarked for their well being.

Lastly, Bhaduri's suggestion, of enforcing accountability at all levels combined with productive participation by the poor at various decentralized levels can chart out the new path to our development, may not be a baseless economic proposition but rather a well thought out action plan of the present compulsion and demand. However to make it happen, the entire machinery of the state, thought processes, policy formulation and the attitude have to undergo a radical change. The all-time prescription, "The Government should act as a Facilitator only" stands to be largely corrected. To expect such an ideal state to exist, the bottom line for idealists like Bhaduri would be that the state must perform the role of an agent of change.

It is a thought-provoking book, demystifying the syndrome "TINA or There Is No Alternative". Set of prescriptions provided by Bhaduri reinforce each other, therefore they need to be considered from an integrated perspective. Anybody interested in the Indian economy will definitely find it insightful. It's a book written against the tide.■

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Strategic Consequences of India's Economic Performance by Sanjaya Baru is a collection of academic essays and newspaper columns which explores the business of diplomacy and the diplomacy of business. The book examines the factors which have shaped India's response to the tectonic shift in the global balance of power in the post-Cold War era, and the role of India's cultural and intellectual 'soft power' in shaping global perceptions of India.
Academic Foundation, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 496, Rs. 795.00

Twilight of the Nation State: Globalisation, Chaos and War by Prem Shankar Jha offers a historical perspective on the rise of capitalism and a synthesis of political and economic theory that sheds light on the consequences of rapid industrialization worldwide.
Vistaar Publications, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 373, Rs. 480.00

Questioning Globalization by Kavaljit Singh debunks several myths associated with globalization processes with the help of case studies and statistical datas.
Madhyam Books, 2006, pp. 192, Rs. 200.00

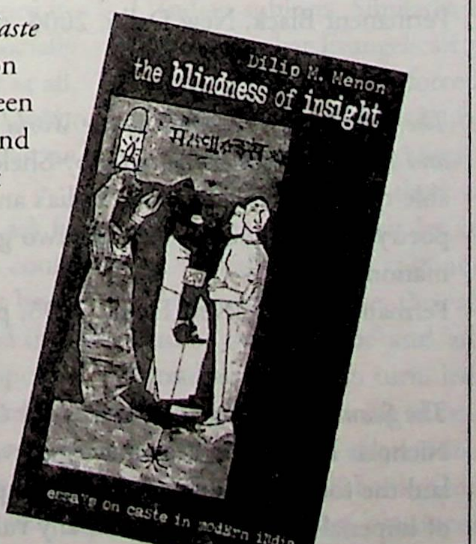
The Permanent Revolution & Results and Prospects by Leon Trotsky edited by Kunal Chattopadhyay, Aninda Banerjee and Saurobijay Sarkar and translated from the Russian by J. Fineberg contains Trotsky's original theory of permanent revolution developed in the last century to explain the socialist revolution in Russia thereby enriching the theoretical arsenal of revolutionary Marxism.
Aakar Books, 2005, pp. 265, Rs. 550.00

Introducing Human Rights: An Overview Including Issues of Gender Justice, Environmental and Consumer Law is a comprehensive document published by the South Asia Human Rights Documentation Centre, 2006, pp. 261, Rs. 195.00

Islam and Mammon: The Economic Predicaments of Islamism by Timur Kuran argues that the doctrine of 'Islamic economics' which entered the Islamic disourses in mid-twentieth century, is symplistic, incoherent and largely irrelevant to present economic challenges.
Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 194, Rs. 395.00

Images of the World: Essays on Religion, Secularism and Culture by T.N. Madan, one of India's distinguished sociologists, explores India's pluralism and faith as a significant psychological and social resource in the lives of millions, in a comparative study of cultures and civilizations.
Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2006, pp. 398, Rs. 595.00

The Blindness of Insight: Essays on Caste in Modern India by Dilip M. Menon explores the intimate relation between the discourses of caste, secularism and communalism to argue that the last may well be the return of the repressed histories of caste.
Navayana, 2006, pp. 168, Rs. 200.00



Untouchability in Rural India by Ghanshyam Shah, Harsh Mander, Sukhadeo Thorat, Satish Deshpande and Amita Baviskar is a documentation of the practice of untouchability with a survey covering 565 villages in 11 states as the base.
Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 216, Rs. 295.00

The Regional Roots of Development Politics in India: A Divided Leviathan by Aseema Sinha presents, through indepth analyses of Gujarat, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, an evaluation of national developmental trajectories, and multilevel framework to understand economic policy, development and globalization.
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 356, Rs. 625.00

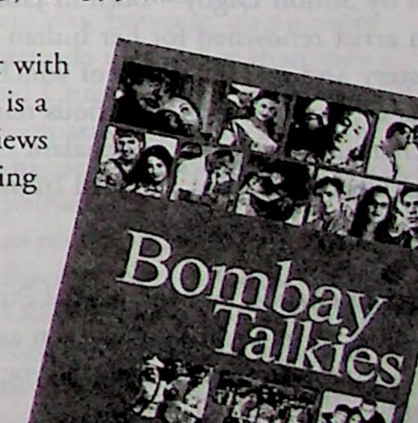
The Partition of India by Anita Inder Singh places the Partition of India in an international perspective to show how reasons of state and religious, ethnic or cultural divisions have been inextricably intertwined in creating the situations that have led to partition in different parts of the world.
National Book Trust, India, 2006, pp. 91, Rs. 35.00

Intellectual Property Rights and Communications in Asia: Conflicting Traditions edited by Pradip Ninan Thomas and Tan Servaes has as its central argument the fact that since access to knowledge in a knowledge economy is a passport to better quality of life, its fair distribution and universal availability ought to become a standard norm. The essays explore the contested nature of the ownership of and access to knowledge and support it with illustrative case studies from the Asian region.
Sage Publications, Delhi, 2006, pp. 262, Rs. 595.00

Unwritten Flaws of Indian Bureaucracy by Barun Kumar Sahu provides unconventional insights into inscrutable public (even private) bureaucracies, where chaos is the order of the day and imperfection the ubiquitous pattern.
Pustak Mahal, Delhi, 2006, pp. 247, Rs. 295.00

The Small Tigers of Shergarh by Ranjit Lall is a story set in a game sanctuary and tells about a battle between good and evil.
IndiaInk/Roli Books, 2006, pp. 343, Rs. 395.00

Bombay Talkies by Mayank Shekhar with a foreword by Ashutosh Gowariker is a compilation of sharp and witty reviews chronicling Bollywood cinema during 2004 and 2005. These reviews had appeared in *Mid Day* and *Mumbai Mirror* where the author worked during this period.
Frog Books, 2006, pp. 268, Rs. 295.00



Collected Plays Vol. Two: Screen, Stage and Radio Plays by Mahesh Dattani showcases the play-wright's talent as a writer and director, and his wide thematic and stylistic range.
Penguin, 2006, pp. 572, Rs. 450.00

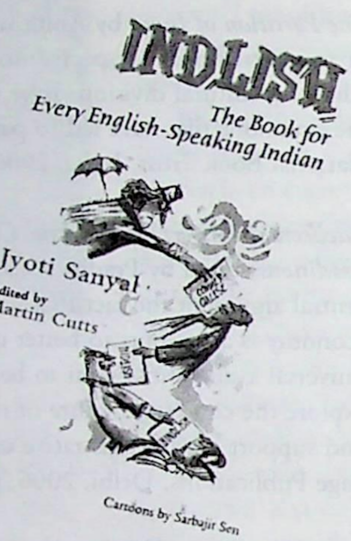
Dance Like a Man: A Stage Play in Two Acts by Mahesh Dattani is a study in human relationships and weaknesses framed by the age old battle between tradition and youthful rebellion.
Penguin, Delhi, 2006, pp. 74, Rs. 99.00

St. Stephen's College: A History by Ashok Jaitley, a former sudent, recreates the evolution of this institution from its inception in 1881 to the present,

belief that 'morality is a human matter, inseparable from reason and compassion.
Flambard Press Poetry, 2006, pp. 62, £7.00

The Story of English in India by N. Krishnaswamy and Lalitha Krishnaswamy presents historical facts in a socio-cultural framework and all those interested in the politics of language and education in India would find it useful.
Foundation Books, 2006, pp. 225, Rs. 150.00

Indlish: The Book for Every English-Speaking Indian by Jyoti Sanyal has been edited by Martin Cutts and is enlivened by cartoons by Sarbajit Sen. This funny, quirky book highlights the ways in which victorian English hangs like a dead albatross around every educated Indian's neck and how Indian English is often no more than an Indian language in disguise. The author devotes himself to Clear English India after thirty years of journalism (www.clearenglish.in)
Viva Books, 2006, pp. 394, Rs. 295.00



My Temporary Son: An Orphan's Journey by Timeri N. Murari offers an intimate glimpse into the convoluted corridors of the adoption processes in India and the emotional turmoil that accompanies every case.
Penguin, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 231, Rs. 250.00

Wonder Tales of South Asia: Translated from Hindi, Urdu, Nepali and Persian by Simon Digby—born in Jabalpur in 1932, the son of a judge and an artist renowned for her Indian landscapes—is a collection of tales of mystery and marvel, many of which celebrate the wholly improbable exploits of the holy men of various religions in the Indian subcontinent--an enchanting display of nonchalant erudition.
Oxford University Press (Oxford India Paperbacks), 2006, pp. 303, Rs. 295.00

The Patiala Quarlet by Neel Kamal Puri tells of a town caught in a time warp yoked to its princely past even as it grapples with the looming spectre of terrorism which plays havoc with Punjab through the decade of the 1980s.
Penguin, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 174, Rs. 225.00

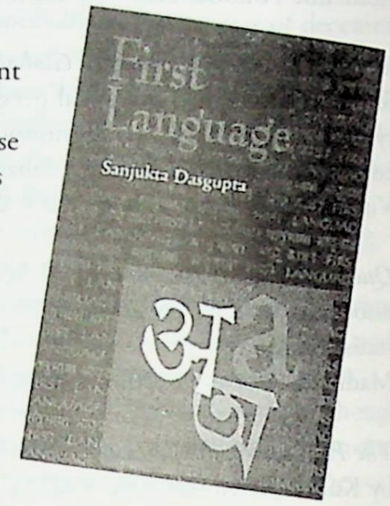
Elvis, Raja: Stories by M.G. Vassanji, a gripping collection of stories that span the globe. Wassanji weaves, with assurance and a mastery over details, twelve haunting tales of lives transplated, of the traumas small and large of migration, of the bitterness of memory and the unexpected consequences of hope.
Penguin, Delhi, 2006, pp. 218, Rs. 250.00

Tales Once Told: Legends of Kerala by Abraham Eraly, a selection of stories adopted from the *Ithihyamala*, a treasury of legends from Kerala, this volume evokes a long-lost never-never land.
Penguin, Delhi, 2006, pp. 200, Rs. 200.00

Conflict and Other Stories by Shubham Gupta delves into love, relationships and plain story-telling of lives that just go on and on.
Frog Books, 2006, pp. 198, Rs. 250.00

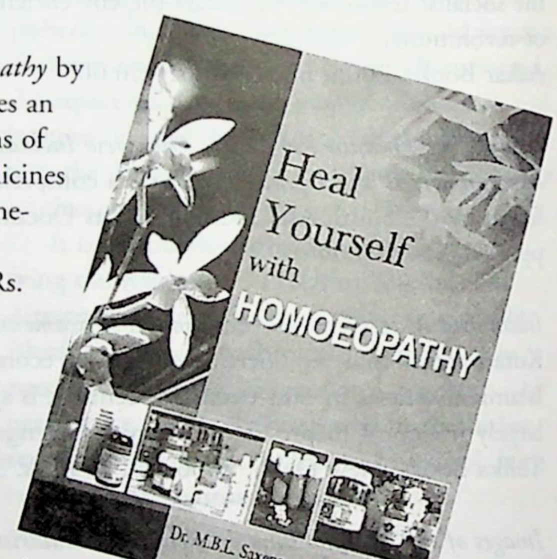
The Page 3 Murders: A Lalli Mystery by Kalpana Swaminathan is the gripping tale of another silver-haired woman who is the answer to the force's prayers as a sleuth a la Miss Marple.
IndiaInk, 2006, pp. 287, Rs. 295.00

First Language by Sanjukta Dasgupta, professor and former Head, Department of English, Calcutta University, is a collection of poems imbued with a sense of detached humour even as the poet is involved in the experience of living.
Dasgupta & Company, 2005, pp. 80, Rs. 90.00



Amitabh: The Making of a Superstar by Susmita Dasgupta seeks answers to what makes Amitabh Bachchan the star he is--genius as actor, ability to connect with the masses and the classes alike.
Penguin, 2006, pp. 187, Rs. 250.00

Heal Yourself with Homeopathy by Dr. M.B.L. Saxena provides an overview of various systems of treatment with single medicines and combinations--in homeopathy.
UBSPD, 2006, pp. 181, Rs. 225.00



Relocating Modern Science: Circulation and the Construction of Scientific Knowledge in South Asia and Europe by Kapil Raj draws on recent scholarship in the history and sociology of science, as well as in imperial and colonial history, and challenges both the belief that modern science was created uniquely in the West and the assumption that it was subsequently diffused, or imposed, elsewhere.
Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 285, Rs. 650.00

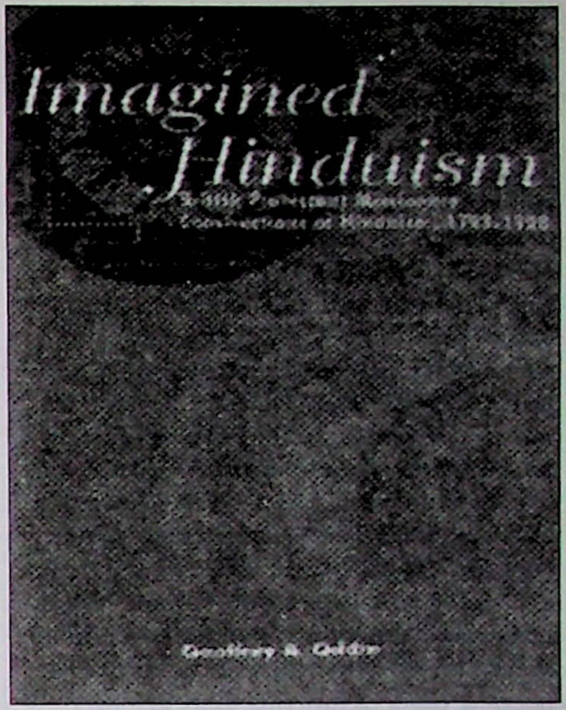
The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India by Sheldon Pollock explores the remarkable rise and fall of Sanskrit, India's ancient language, as a vehicle for poetry and polity by tracing the two great moments of this transformation.
Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 684, Rs. 895.00

The Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Britain by Nicholas B. Dirks is a fascinating, devastating account of the scandal that laid the foundation of the British Empire explains how this substitution of imperial authority for Company rule helped erase the dirty origins of empire and justify the British presence in India.
Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 389, Rs. 650.00

A Prisoner of Presuppositions

Amiya P.Sen

IMAGINED HINDUISM: BRITISH PROTESTANT MISSIONARY CONSTRUCTIONS OF HINDUISM, 1793-1900
By Geoffrey A. Oddie
Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 349, Rs. 450.00



Allowing for a few exceptions, the dominant thesis now evident in works on Hinduism is that the term itself as well its ideological and material content were determined only under British colonial rule. Some eminent scholars, and I can immediately think of Nicholas Dirks, have even gone to the extent of arguing that caste and 'culture' were also, in good measure, products of this colonial encounter (Dirks, *The Invention of Caste*, Social Analysis, 1989; *Colonialism and Culture*,1992). The problem here is that the notion of 'postcoloniality' that is particularly keen to establish such claims tends to examine Indian time and social experiences only with reference to the colonial era. It comes as no surprise that 'Hinduism', as the present work asserts, existed only in the imagination of some colonialist Europeans, in this case, British Protestant missionaries. However, the reader will notice as I certainly did, that our author also chooses to employ the term 'construction', the semantic and social possibilities of which, in my opinion, are not quite the same as that of 'imagination'.

Now short of sounding trite or rhetorical, I would want to state here that all social sciences rest on the premise that everything is humanly constructed in space and time. This may be distinguished from the postulates in theology that may well be premised on the 'divinely bequeathed' or 'revealed'. The problem with 'imagined'-'imagination' is that in a deeper sense, it remains quite equivocal and ambiguous. Imagination, at one level, may be pure fantasy, signifying what matters 'could be' without necessarily working towards an active transformation of the status quo. At another level, it may be seen as a deviant category in relation to something that is 'real' or socially exists. If I have understood our author at all, neither of these meanings can be attributed to missionary perceptions of Hindu religion or culture.

The equally important question to ask here is whether the missionaries themselves could not draw the distinction between what belonged to the realm of imagination and that of understanding. If what they wrote or spoke with regard to Hinduism, was also based on enquiry and observation, this is a distinction that must be presumed to have been made. If this was not the case, we would be led to believe, perhaps against our better judgment, that there could never be any honest or impartial reporting of one culture by another and that one must remain, in every case, a prisoner of one's presuppositions. Sadly, there also would not be, under the circumstances, the sheer joy and excitement of some cultural discovery.

In the work under review, Geoffrey A.Oddie brings to some fullness, arguments that he has been developing over a long time, albeit intermittently. Two earlier pieces by him on missionary 'constructions' of Hinduism that I can recall appeared in 1994 and 2003 respectively. However, all of that and more are now available in this handy and extremely useful volume that combines quite effectively, the advantages of a general survey and a well researched monograph. We have here a wealth of information on Protestant missions and missionaries in India; the relatively greater emphasis placed on Bengal and south India, I gather, is in keeping with both the nature of developments and the author's personal interests.

More often than not, Oddie's arguments are adequately supported by evidence that he gleans from a variety of sources, some extremely rare and inaccessible. On the other hand, importantly enough, he does not forget to qualify them in the light of contrary possibilities. Thus, even when critiquing Edward Said for not sufficiently distinguishing missionary motives from that of the colonialist, he also takes care to remind us how often these overlapped. Though primarily interested in the progress of the human soul, missionaries nevertheless persuaded the colonial state to believe that the dissemination of the gospel and a modern education in schools and colleges would have a vital bearing on the loyalty of Indian subjects. Similarly, the devastating critiques that Evangelicals produced of Hinduism considerably reinforced the Utilitarian thrust of Mill and Macaulay against the 'tyranny' of the indigenous tradition.

In Oddie's view, there were also certain 'presuppositions' that Jesuits, Protestants and Orientalists had in common with respect to Hinduism. For one, they all took the Brahman to be the 'inventor' and 'administrator' of that tradition. This, in turn, led them to privilege textuality, emanating mostly in Brahmanism, over the orality of quotidian culture. Especially in Part II of this book, Oddie examines at length how these presuppositions eventually hardened into a 'dominant' paradigm which took Hinduism to be an unified system with a pan-Indian following. It is thus that the term 'Hinduism' came to be preferred over earlier usages like 'Hindu religion' or 'Hindu creed'. This, we are given to understand, helped missionaries to better locate the 'enemy' (pp.70-71). A similar argument, I find, has been used to explain the European privileging of Vedanta as quintessential Hindu thought (p.265). Such dominant beliefs, Oddie argues, were not contested until the closing years of the nineteenth century, in part owing to the greater familiarity with 'alternative' traditions like Vaishnav/ Saiva bhakti.

In summary, our author detects three kinds of Protestant missionary approaches to Hinduism. First, there is the adversarial attitude that waged a relentless war against Hindu belief and practice. There was, however, also a more empathetic attitude that rather than view Hinduism and Christianity as opposing and mutually incompatible systems, took Christianity to be the historical fulfillment of Hinduism. A third and perhaps the least popular approach focused not so much on formal conversion as the general dissemination of Christian thought and values. Oddie's opinion on the whole is that by the beginning of the twentieth century, Protestant missionary attitudes undergo a twin transformation. At one level, they turn more understanding and tolerant, influenced by Indological researches, self-propelled reform within Hinduism and the legal abolition of irrational practices like sati. There is, at the same time, a greater propensity to dismiss or disqualify the notion of a unified Hinduism. Thus Reverend John Morrison, writing in 1906 could argue that there was nothing distinctive about Hinduism, 'nowhere any stated body of doctrine that might be called the Hindu creed' (Oddie, 287). Evidently, this is a position that several present-day scholars are happy to endorse and appropriate.

There is every reason to believe that Oddie's researches will only further strengthen the claim that but for the colonial interlude, 'Hindu'

would have remained a residual or fictive category and that all those who called themselves Hindus would be perpetually locked in a violent intra-community religious war. Personally, I have no evidence that will definitively prove the contrary. I did nevertheless wish to pose before the author certain queries that came to my mind while I was going through this work. My first query, call it complaint if you will, is that Oddie did not see it fit to engage, however perfunctorily, with those scholars whose views significantly deviate from his. Here he could have brought in Lorenzen's *Who Invented Hinduism?* or the more recent study by Axel Michaels which locates an 'identificatory habitus' within Hinduism. I wondered too if Oddie himself sensed a certain paradox inherent in his thesis. If, for instance, the essentialization of the Hindu identity helped missionaries to narrow down the search for the enemy, I would argue that this also had the opposite effect of fostering unity among a people who, rightly or wrongly, were pluralistic to a fault. I wondered too if it was simply fortuitous that in colonial India, growing missionary doubts about a unified Hinduism and a state sponsored ethnographic interest in the peoples and cultures of India began roughly at the same time. Could it also be that these changes in attitudes too were dictated by shifting concerns within evangelicalism and imperial strategy?

Contrary to Oddie's claims (p.265), I doubt if the privileging of Vedanta represented the triumph of philosophy over religion. Prima facie, this seems to be belied by the life and labours of Rammohun Roy who contributed significanlty to the Vedantist project but also suitably wedded abstract philosophy to manifest forms of devotion and piety. It was this odd amalgamation of the idea of an immanent God and high metaphysics that led Rammohun to confuse, perhaps deliberately, monotheism with monism. I submit that anything else apart, the reason Vedanta appeared so dominant a stream to both Europeans and upper class Indians was its internal flexibility and dynamism that made it possible to combine the worlds of religion and philosophy. Finally, given his frame of analysis, it is surprising that Oddie should omit the interesting debate some of which occurred in the pages of the *Indian Antiquary*, about whether or not Vaishnavism was a derivative of Christianity as Krishna was of Christ. I would be greatly remiss if I failed to mention that all my disagreements apart, I found the present work highly informative and fascinating. It is a work that I realize I will have to constantly and constructively keep referring to in the years to come. Arguably, this might very well be the case with other scholars and students of south Asian history and culture as well.■

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A Micro-history of Two Campaigns

Rajit K Mazumder

THE ANGLO-MARATHA CAMPAIGNS AND THE CONTEST FOR INDIA: THE STRUGGLE FOR CONTROL OF THE SOUTH ASIAN MILITARY ECONOMY
By Randolf G.S. Cooper
Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 437, Rs. 695.00

It must be admitted at the very outset that going through this book has been quite exasperating. Reviewing necessitated it be read cover to cover, and it was not a pleasant experience. Of course, it is not without its merits, but few will come away entirely satisfied, even if they are persuaded by the arguments.

The primary reason for dissatisfaction is that a lot is promised and little delivered. The assertion is that:

> This is a cross-cultural study of the political economy of warfare in South Asia. Randolf G. S. Cooper combines an overview of Maratha military culture with a battle-by-battle analysis of the 1803 Anglo-Maratha Campaigns.

Building on that foundation he challenges ethnocentric assumptions about British superiority in discipline, drill and technology. He asserts that these campaigns, in which Arthur Wellesley served with distinction, represent the military high-water mark of the Marathas who posed the last serious opposition to the formation of the British Raj. He argues that the real contest for India was never a single decisive battle for the subcontinent. Rather it turned on a complex social and political struggle for control of the South Asian military economy. The author shows that victory in 1803 hinged as much on finance, politics and intelligence at it did on battlefield manoeuvre and war itself.

Is Cooper credibly able to accomplish the tasks set out above? The book does contain greatly detailed description of the two campaigns in the Deccan and Hindustan, but this would delight hardcore military historians, or those interested solely in the two campaigns. More positively, Cooper is able to show that British manpower, weapons and strategy was not superior to that of the Marathas. One is also persuaded that 1803 was the acme of Maratha military power. But, whoever made the argument that the struggle for India was decided in one single battle? And, as far as the very significant final contention goes, not enough is provided to convincingly argue the point (more on this later).

In this age of stylish jargon posing as solid academic work it is not surprising that the first sentence is fashionably eye-catching. Cooper further explains: 'Within my studies, "cross-cultural conflict analysis" came to mean an analysis of war's dynamics as influenced by the presence of competing cultures. The conflicting cultures might be ethnic, racial, religious, national, political, or any combination thereof; although for me the most challenging case studies were those that featured conflict between competing military cultures' (p. 2). Unfortunately, the book has not unambiguously revealed that the Marathas and the British had significantly different military cultures. Instead, Cooper has made a convincing argument that there was not much to differentiate between the two armies in terms of the quality of the men, the tactics of warfare, and even in weaponry (Daulat Rao Sindhia's armies actually had superior artillery). The 'mercenary' nature of the Maratha armies and the 'military labour market' in 19th century South Asia resulted in perhaps the one major difference in military 'culture' between the Europeans and the Marathas. Cooper contrasts 'the predominance of a "duty, honour, country" mentality' of the British with the pragmatism of the Marathas – who saw no dishonour to negotiate the surrender of a fort if troops hadn't been paid by their Maratha overlords, and if the British promised to do so (p. 137).

Thus, while it is possible to agree with the contention that 'military victory obscured the degree to which a Western power misread an Asian opponent' (p. 3) it hasn't been adequately demonstrated that that misreading had to do with 'cultural' differences. On the eventual success in the Deccan, Cooper concluded: 'But Arthur (Wellesley) also had to confront the truth at having misread more than Maratha military culture. He had misjudged rather substantial parts of the South Asian military environment by seeking to transfer theories from one micro-environment to the subcontinent as a whole' (p. 137). But, what does this mean? There is no explanation. In support, all the proof Cooper provides us with are: (a) the exaggerated sense of urgency Arthur Wellesley acquired on the basis of the Maratha reputation of crossing rivers in the monsoon, and (b) the eventually catastrophic assumption that Maratha armies were primarily dependent on light cavalry, and did not possess adequately disciplined infantry tactics or artillery doctrine.

However, one can argue that these are 'military' rather than 'cultural' mistakes. For, as Cooper writes, Wellesley's 'true belief [was] that

the Marathas were militarily nothing but an assemblage of "predatory horse"…. Threat *perception* was to influence both his tactics and attitude' (p. 71, emphasis in original). In fact, Cooper clearly shows that Arthur Wellesley ignored the warning of Lt. Col. John Ulrich Collins, the British Resident at Sindhia's court, and who had first-hand knowledge of the Maratha troops. Collins had personally warned Wellesley: "I tell you, General, as to their cavalry, you may ride over them wherever you meet them; but their infantry and guns will astonish you" (pp. 80-81). We are asked to believe that Collins, an old fashioned British veteran (who was 'laughed at' by Wellesley's subordinates for his 'archaic mid-eighteenth century uniform'), could overcome the 'cultural' differences supposedly existing between the Marathas and the Europeans and make an accurate assessment of Maratha capability. If Wellesley's 'misreading' was indeed 'cultural', surely all British officers in India would be equally affected. Why could Wellesley, whose military reputation is infinitely more celebrated, not overcome his preconceived notions, even when he was categorically cautioned by Collins? 'Cross-cultural analysis' cannot mask the fact that the future hero of Waterloo made a rather bad military mistake at Assaye, and paid for it with huge, and avoidable, loss of life. Victory enabled Wellesley to escape official censure of his near fatal tactics, and historians have been more than generous in maintaining, unblemished, the glorious career of the man who eventually defeated Napoleon. At least this reader was not convinced either by the validity or by the explanation of 'cross-cultural analysis' as offered, and which purports to be the primary USP of the book.

The first chapter is, ultimately, a history of the rise of Maratha power. 'Maratha military culture' is linked to 'the political economy of war' and 'the concept of the South Asian military economy' is 'central' to the chapter. One cannot see what the novelty of all this is. The works of Kolff, Alavi, Bayly, among others, have shown the linkages between society and the military economy. Moreover, there is a tremendous amount of detail about aspects of Maratha military evolution. Military historians could possibly enjoy the diversions that 16th*C* warfare in the Deccan 'escaped detailed European observation' and 'the early South Asian lead in artillery quality and volume of firepower was sustained in the transition from siege artillery to massive field artillery'; that 'transportation corps' were created using camels and elephants to move heavy cannons, whereas the Europeans didn't have the mobility (p. 19). Others, like me, will have to wince and bear it.

Chapter two 'looks at British military perceptions of the Marathas prior to the war in 1803' and claims that 'One by-product of this chapter is a heightened sense of the degree to which British ruling elites could mirror their counterparts in South Asia' (p. 62). If this were so, then, surely, one cannot sustain the argument that the British could not assess their opponent's *military* strategies because of *cultural* barriers. The chapter also argues that these perceptions affected actual fighting, and the biggest mistake was to perceive the Marathas to prefer guerilla-type hit and run tactics. 'Arthur Wellesley was preparing to fight the Marathas as he understood them and, in doing so, he was committing the soldier's sin of preparing to fight the last war and not the next…. Arthur has dwelt upon the element of the chase to the point of obsession' (p. 71). At the risk of appearing to be obsessed with this point, just as Cooper is, it is germane to point out that here, again, is proof of Arthur Wellesley making a military mistake, not a cultural one.

The next two chapters are a detailed exposition of the actual campaigns in the Deccan and Hindustan, respectively. They make for tedious reading, unless one enjoys reading about battles, the tactics and strategies used, and revels in the minutest of details such as the names, dimensions, and range of the cannons used, the description of manoeuvres, details of individual incidents like the one concerning Wellesley's decapitated dragoon orderly (p. 105), and yet another diversion, this time discussing the disagreement over the 'time-line' of the engagement at Assaye (p. 106). Similarly, in Chapter 4, there is a great amount of space allotted to a discussion on the training of the cavalry under General Gerard Lake (the British Commander-in-Chief, and leading the Hindustan campaign), the story of horse-drawn artillery in South Asia, of the series of sieges against the mud forts of recalcitrant zamindars – one couldn't quite understand the point of it all in terms of the Maratha wars. The book is full of such excursions that add to its volume without enhancing the narrative. The one argument that is convincingly made, however, is that, 'The 1803 campaign showed that overwhelming firepower was not a guarantor of victory; if it was then the Marathas would have won the war' (p. 210).

'Coming in' is the intriguing title of the penultimate chapter, and it is by far the most interesting. Here is the fascinating 'story concerning the Marathas' European and Euro-Asian mercenaries (which) has never been clearly placed against the backdrop of covert intelligence, financial negotiations and espionage, (and it)….presents a tale of intrigue that calls into question the accepted reasons for British military victory over the Marathas in 1803' (p. 213). It highlights that the proclamation by Richard Wellesley's (Arthur's elder brother, and the Governor General of India) before the outbreak of hostilities, that warned that all Britons fighting for the Marathas would be considered traitors, forced the numerous British mercenaries with the Maratha armies to decide on 'coming in'. They brought with them intimate knowledge of the Maratha fighting machine and strategies, but, more critically, crippled Sindhia's command structure and left a void in leadership that could not be reconstituted at such short notice. As Cooper persuasively concludes, 'Beckett (the British ADC and personal secretary to Perron, the French chief of Sindhia's armies) – although a loyal Briton – told Lake's staff, upon 'coming in', that they could not have beaten Sindhia's army if the defections had not taken place and that on a unit-to-unit basis the Marathas' sepoys were better soldiers' (p. 254).

Cooper makes two other significant claims in this chapter: First that, "The Wellesley administration proved extremely competitive and deficit spending was an essential military tool in this war." Unfortunately, nowhere in the book is this important assertion substantiated. The second, more convincing, claim is that "the espionage and extent of buy-outs from sepoy to C-in-C (sic) serve as the greatest explanation of how Sindhia's powerful war machine could be defeated in less than 150 days of campaigning" (p. 282). However, once again, the chapter suffers from the excessive detail provided of the connections and intrigues between the various dramatis personae in the Sindhia court, Maratha, British, French, et al, and the machinations that induced British mercenaries to 'come in'.

In the final chapter Cooper has been able to make the case that the reasons commonly and historically associated with British success do not hold water. These are:

1. 'The momentum of British victory' in the Napoleonic Wars in Europe, which Cooper easily demonstrates to be the weakest argument for British success (pp. 286-287).
2. 'Superior training, discipline and drill' – Cooper proves that the 'men who made up the bulk of sepoys in the Bengal and Bombay Presidencies in 1803 were from pre-existing and overlapping military labour markets commonly shared by the Marathas and the British' (p. 289).
3. 'Superior British artillery' – there is much detailed discussion on Maratha artillery doctrine, metallurgical developments, range and firing power, et al to prove that the 'Marathas had embraced artillery as the result of their military evolution and not from any perception of a military revolution…. There is no credible evidence that the British possessed artillery parity, let alone superiority, in the 1803 Anglo-Maratha Campaigns' (p. 299).

The previous chapter had hinted at the role of money in British victory and the final one tries to convince us that this was indeed the main reason for it. The most convincing way to do so would be to provide information on the respective financial strengths of the Marathas and the British, and what they could, or did, garner for the wars. No comparative data of financial resources is provided. Thus,

> ...while it is possible to agree with the contention that 'military victory obscured the degree to which a Western power misread an Asian opponent' (p. 3) it hasn't been adequately demonstrated that that misreading had to do with 'cultural' differences.

Cooper is able neither to demonstrate that the British had superior monetary resources nor how this affected their campaigns. Instead, we are asked to assume, via deductive logic rather than hard statistics, that the British financial might eventually had the most telling impact in 1803. One is not arguing that the Marathas were financially more powerful than the British, but rather that Cooper hasn't done more than simply state it. Sample the following:

'It is hard to conceive of an economic argument that would dare place the Marathas on an equal footing with the British as an economic superpower.' But no data are provided, the argument is based on logical assumptions – the EIC's financial clout derived from being 'one of the first publicly traded companies to systematically develop global markets as an integral means of increasing shareholder value in the process of exponentially increasing corporate wealth'; its leverage on international money markets; and its partnership with the Crown (pp. 300-01). Furthermore, 'The *jaidad* as an economic building block for military funding within the South Asian military economy was too archaic to compete against an internationally based crown corporation with access to a global line of credit. Maratha revenue collection within a war zone remained precarious, while the British could use less physically vulnerable international capital markets to dominate the South Asian military economy, purchasing victory and then imposing a form of peace that would feed the process by restoring revenue collections to be ploughed back into the EIC's coffers.' Were the British able to use these international linkages? Shouldn't it be proved that funds were actually raised internationally for the Maratha campaigns, and that these were actually spent there? Another typically unsubstantiated, yet, on the face of it, wholly possible, assertion is that 'Additional opium could be shifted to Canton and bullion could be diverted from the China trade en route to London' (pp. 301-302). Once again, no figures, no statistics, not even references to any correspondence that this was even contemplated is forwarded as evidence.

A different argument is that the British government was in London and the Marathas posed no threat there, whereas the British could easily disrupt Maratha financial and political stability by interfering with the clans, their trading centres, et al. (p. 301). That may be true, but if this was a critical advantage then the British ought to have soundly defeated a bunch of belligerent colonists in America in the 1770s – who were protesting their inability to influence decisions taken in London on their behalf.

Cooper himself provides the ammunition to doubt the extent of British financial power when he writes that 'the final Maratha war (1817-18) was a mopping-up operation designed to complete the EIC's unfinished expansion of 1803-05, which had been cut short by London's budgetary worries about balancing Richard Wellesley's deficits against funding needed for the Napoleonic Wars' (p. 303).

Despite this, Cooper is able to assert 'that 'superior credit' is without dispute', and then goes on to ask 'the question of how it factored into the mechanics of British victory in 1803'. Even though he mentions 'purchased defections of mercenary officers in Maratha service' there is no quantification of any sort, but rather an explanation (repeating what had gone before in Ch. 5) of its military impact – the destruction of Sindhia's command structure, the loss of effective combat leadership, the loss of intelligence. This is both repetitive and a lengthy diversion from the central focus of the subsection (pp. 304-05).

The book is beautifully produced, as can be expected from CUP, though the Indian version is not as fine. I would have preferred the notes to be at the bottom of the page as footnotes rather than as endnotes since Cooper uses these quite extensively to embellish the text. And, when there are footnotes, they provide unnecessary detail: (p. 9, on Daulat Rao Sindia: footnote: 'Aka Dowlut Row Sindia, Daulat Rao Shinde, Dulat Row Scindiah, Dowlut Rao Scindhia, Daulat Rao Schinde, Dowlet Row Scindeah, Daulat Rao Sindhia (b.1780-d.1827)'; p. 17, Pune: footnote: '18 +, 73 +. Aka Poonah, Poona, Punah.')

I think the book suffers from being a poorly edited dissertation-turned-monograph, and is further encumbered by additions made over its ten year gestation: much of the story is in the endnotes (footnotes and endnotes do not count towards the total word limit of Cambridge PhD dissertations), and the diversions in the main text seem to be of the nature intended to impress examiners with the depth of the writer's familiarity with sources and minutiae. Moreover, the monograph is a micro-history of the two campaigns in 1803, and the general reader will be confused about their linkages with the previous and the following Anglo-Maratha conflicts. There is very little, and quite poor, contextualization. Also, one immediately noticed the lack of contemporary Maratha sources making the book, despite Cooper's avowed attempt to break away from the clutches of existing European accounts, primarily dependent on British sources. We don't have any means of assessing what the Marathas perceived of their adversaries, nor, indeed, if there is even the slightest hint of corroboration of 'cross-cultural analysis' in Maratha sources.

The writing style was an added reason for the frustration provoked by the book. Many sentences are difficult to comprehend. This is how Cooper locates the responsiveness of Maratha military culture to market forces: 'It probably began with small Maratha warrior bands that had a societal predisposition to organizational adaptability and military survival' (p. 16). What this 'societal predisposition' is, and how or why it came about, is not explained, even if we were to accept its presence.

Readers would have gathered by now that the narrative regularly deviates from the central argument and goes off on lengthy tangents – making one repeatedly wonder what the original point was. The subsection on Peshwa Baji Rao I in the first chapter contains a hugely distracting discussion on how the Battle of Dabhoi in 1731 'can be cited as moving Baji Rao I's doctrine out of the realm of neo-classical warfare and placing it directly into the category of proto-modern warfare...(p.36)' with a discussion on 'the volume of fire theory', advance in Maratha tactical theory on the use of various types of cannons, a detailed discussion on flintlocks and matchlocks and their firing mechanisms, comparison between South Asian matchlocks and European muskets, etc. (pp. 34-42).

Cooper is also repetitive – both in ideas and language. A glaring example of this: 'Lieutenant Charles Stuart was the most honest diarist in stating that in fact the majority of the Maratha infantry at the battle site were not killed but rather 'dispersed'' (p. 187). And, again, on p.210: 'Sindhia's battalions had been dispersed and therefore directly removed from Maratha service, but the majority of his sepoys had not been physically destroyed. Charles Stuart of the Bengal Cavalry had it right when he indicated that Sindhia's battalions were not so much destroyed as they were 'dispersed'.' Such glitches point to sloppiness on part of the author as well as the editors.

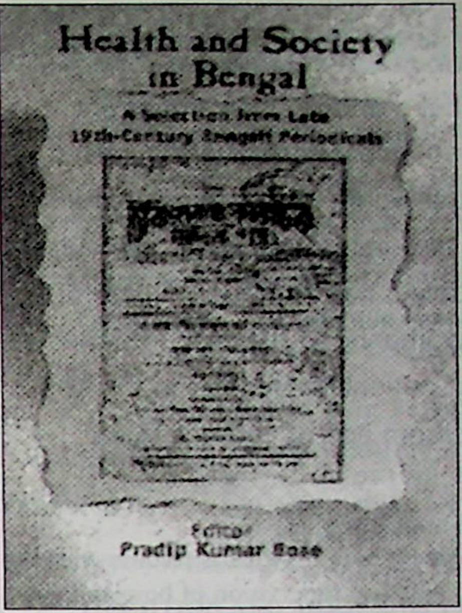
Thus, the book is problematic both in form and in content. Its merits lie in the detail, but this can attract only the most dedicated of highly specialized interests.■

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Orientalist Mirrors

Mohan Rao

HEALTH AND SOCIETY IN BENGAL: A SELECTION FROM LATE 19TH CENTURY BENGALI PERIODICALS
Edited by Pradip Kumar Bose
Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2006, pp.293, Rs.680.00



From about the middle of the nineteenth century in Bengal arose fierce debates about our country, our sciences, our arts, indeed our manners, customs and ceremonies. British racism had hardened during this period; to the colonizers it was evident that Indian civilization had nothing to offer, not science, not arts, indeed nothing at all. As Macaulay perhaps typifying this attitude said in his notorious Minute on education, all the learning of the East was not worth one shelf in any library in Europe. The reaction among the colonized was a sense of deep shame and anguish, filled too with nationalistic incomprehension, anger and pride. Along with the Orientalists, some of them harked back to the glory of ancient "Hindu" sciences, to the arts, and indeed to their "Aryan" past, a civilization that was said to have been at its pinnacle of achievements in diverse fields.

"Women and motherhood" has of course been an extremely important trope in the construction of nations across the world. In the case of India what is also imbricated in this discourse is the troubled, indeed fraught, ideas of Indian womanhood that had informed a range of nationalist debates in the 19th century, from age of consent to sati. During this period Indian women had been objects of nationalist reformist agendas setting right what were conceived of as the aberrations of the recent past; practices such as widow immolation and child marriages were evidence to the British that they did indeed have a civilizing mission among the barbaric and traditional natives. Extremely contentious debates had arisen about the new or modern Indian woman to be brought into being in a new Indian nation; a woman who was to be distinguished both from the materialistic ungodly western woman and the common Indian woman, superstitious and sexually promiscuous.

Reflecting these concerns, and as a consequence of the development of the science of eugenics – and of comparative anatomy, anthropology and phrenology – in the West, concern was equally about the degeneration of the Indian "race". It was self evident that there was such a thing as race; it was equally self-evident that Brahmins, indeed the dwijas, were repositories of the ancient knowledge of the Aryans, albeit tarnished now due to centuries of foreign conquest. How, then, was India to re-attain her past glory? What had caused the degeneration of the Indian race? Could Ayurveda be given a new lease of life? Or was it superstitious and unscientific – as the British and a section of Indians in thrall with "western" medicine, claimed? What indeed was science? Were not the Aryans above all a scientific race when they laid down eternal laws of nature and conduct? Wasn't the caste system based on the scientific observation of human nature, that some people were better suited for some occupations than others?[1] Was not it true that the degeneration of Indian society had occurred precisely because Indians had ceased to pay attention to the teachings of the ancients and because the elites were enthralled by everything western? Was not it also because the shudras did not accept their rightful place any more?

These are some of the fascinating questions discussed in the excerpts from eight journals dealing with health during the period roughly between 1850 and 1900. These were popular journals reaching out to the people, albeit educated ones marked by ease of reading, written in a friendly chatty style, involving the reader. The excerpts dealing with the degeneration of the Indian/Bengali reveal a painful, and telling, obsession with tracing Aryan roots to Bengali language and culture. What had caused this degeneration then?

> The wise, pious and ascetically disposed Aryans…in our scriptures…framed laws after minutely studying the needs of human beings…People have to take up various professions for survival. Again it is on the nature of their work that their caste affiliation depends. Similarly, individuals too are found to differ in nature according to the castes they belong to…..This is the reason the ancient Aryans enjoyed long and healthy lives. Leave aside very ancient times, even during the rule of the wantonly capricious Muslims, the proliferation of untimely mortality on today's scale was an unheard of phenomenon due to our ancestors' touching faith in the Hindu religion.

(Excerpt from *Chikitsak-o-Samalochak*, 1895, pp.86-87).

One answer was child marriages—which, it is argued – is a consequence as well as a cause for this degeneration. This not only caused immense damage to the health of mothers and children, it also damaged the race. Yet another cause, it was argued, was the sexual promiscuity engendered by the huge growth of prostitution. In 1853, the population of Calcutta was 400,000, with 12,419 prostitutes among them, according to the *Calcutta Review*; by 1867, it is said, the number had increased to 30,000. But of course, prostitutes, like the lower castes, do not have a voice, indeed a presence other than as agents of disease and degeneration, for we do not know what caused this massive increase. Was it colonial policy leading to the pauperization of the peasantry, forcing women out of their villages, to eke out a living in the city? The dispossession of the peasantry and the destruction of cottage industries also led to large-scale hunger and displacement. Was the growth of prostitution the effect of famines and the consequent epidemics that devastated the countryside?

Yet another reason commonly cited—at least by the evidence of these excerpts—was masturbation—and not just among adolescent boys. Girls too were apparently exposed to a great deal of harmful talk about sex and sexuality. One journal argues that a third of all out-patients in the clinics of the kavirajs were ill due to masturbation. Masturbation is said to cause a range of illnesses, prevent students from studying; it is also said to cause a shortening of the penis, madness, tuberculosis, and perhaps more significantly, a weakening of the Bengali physique. It was also said to be a leading cause of infertility among women, again leading to degeneration of the race. Racial concerns, it was argued, did not receive the attention they ought to. "Though people take so much pain over improving the quality of the livestock, when it is a question of improving the quality of their own family and race, constituting the very summit of the animal kingdom, they do not take any precautions whatsoever" (p.160) rues a journal. Why is it not realized that "the soul aim of intercourse between men and women is to produce healthy and vigorous children and that it is the caprice of changed times that it is reduced only to a means for lewd people to satisfy their sexual desires" (p.158)? Thus along with reform of marriage—the better to follow

"Women and motherhood" has of course been an extremely important trope in the construction of nations across the world. In the case of India what is also imbricated in this discourse is the troubled, indeed fraught, ideas of Indian womanhood that had informed a range of nationalist debates in the 19th century, from age of consent to sati.

the laws set by Manu—what is recommended is a strengthening of supervision of boys and girls, especially in schools.

I have often wondered why so many Bengalis among my friends have a penchant for marrying Punjabis—whom they promptly convert to Bongs. I now know it is because the journal *Swasthya* in 1901 recommended this in the interest of national health. "Quite some time back," it is noted, " Babu Akshay Kumar Datta wrote in his book, entitled *Analysis of the Relationship between Human Nature and the (Material) Environment*, that marriage between Bengalis and Sikhs would have desirable results. The admixture of the Bengali intellect with the robust constitution of a Sikh in the progeny would have enhanced the all-around attributes of the Indian child"(p.135).

Equally fascinating insights are provided into perceptions of colonial efforts at controlling plague—cautious scepticism, to small pox and towards environmental hygiene—surely no westerner knows cleanliness like we do! What is equally evident through all these concerns is how they hold a mirror to Orientalism, reflecting and reifying it. What is also clear is that the roots of Hindutva seem to be laid somewhere here in all its anxieties. Unfortunately the editor in his Introduction does not explore these ideas. Nor does he tell us—this is a difficult demand—how representative these journals are and why he selected them? Is it because they dealt primarily with health? Surely women's journals would also have addressed many of these issues and concerns? These not-so-minor cavils apart, the book is a huge delight to read.■

Reference

[1] Medical students on strike across the country against reservations for the Other Backward Castes echoed this recently. As the French would say it, *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.*

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Of Continuities and Discontinuities

Rajib Dasgupta

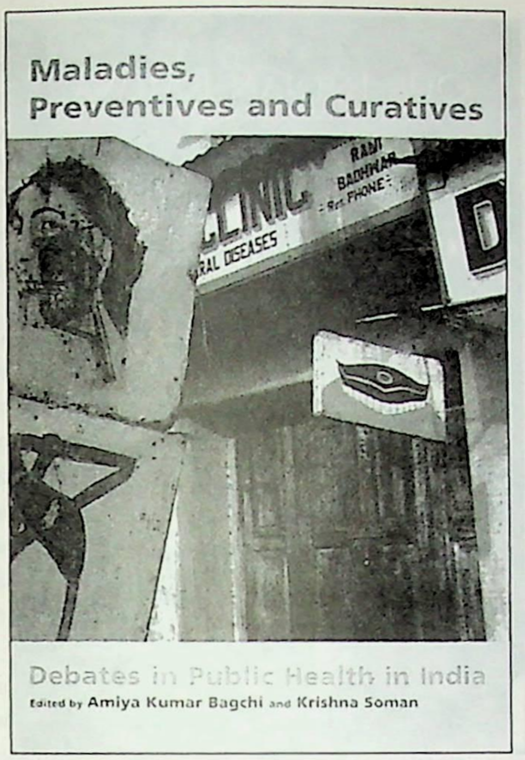
MALADIES, PREVENTIVES AND CURATIVES : DEBATES IN PUBLIC HEALTH IN INDIA
Edited by Amiya Kumar Bagchi and Krishna Soman
Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2005, pp. xi+173, Rs. 350.00

This edited volume of ten chapters is an output of a national seminar 'Colonial and Post-Colonial Experience' organized by the Department of History, Kolkata University and the Institute of Development Studies, Kolkata with support from the Indian Council of Social Science Research. The contributors are scholars of eminence in the fields of public health and history and this linkage is relevant for the understanding of public health issues and plan for appropriate action. Certain strands of contemporary public health are increasingly divesting themselves of historicity and are looking for quick-fix solutions that are often not in consonance with the contextual situation of the particular problem. This volume not only puts back the strong bonds of history and public health on the forefront but bridges the 'Continuities and Discontinuities' (to borrow the title of Qadeer's chapter) of the colonial and postcolonial era at a time when public health education in India is set for radical changes.

The volume is dedicated to Sahib Singh Sokhey. Major General Sahib Singh Sokhey is a shining example of continuity across colonial and postcolonial periods. He headed the Sub-Committee on National Health (popularly, Sokhey Committee) of the National Planning Committee that was constituted with Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru as its Chairman in 1938. It made significant contributions on a number of issues including integration of medical education. He was also among the first group of nominated members of the Rajya Sabha; nominated as a medical scientist. In 1953 he said in Parliament that "A Parliamentary Government does not *ipso facto* become a democracy" and added, "…all Honourable Members here and all Members of every party should realize that…we have to deliberately work and act in the true spirit of democracy". This is as true of the spirit of public health.

It is significant that the editors have titled their overview chapter as 'Public Health and Nutrition' though nutrition *per se* is not a major theme of the volume. This essential link and the thesis that historically, in nineteenth century England and Wales, improvement in the environment – a rising standard of living, particularly, improved diet, and, hygienic changes introduced by the sanitary reformers was responsible for a large reduction of mortality. While debate over this McKeown's thesis has recently been reopened, Sheila Zurbrigg's analysis of data from pre-Independence Punjab has thrown up additional evidence on the importance of nutrition and welfare measures. It is extremely relevant and timely to bring back hunger and nutrition to public health discourse. Drawing upon the paper of R. Radhakrishna and C. Ravi ('Emerging Nutritional Trends in India and Their Implications'), the editors underscore the point that macro-cereal security (that has been one of the key parameters of planning) did not translate to household level nutrition security. The disjunction between reduction of income poverty and high prevalence of malnutrition (assessed by anthropometric indicators) has been analysed incisively through analysis of several data sources – National Sample Survey (NSS) and National Nutrition Monitoring Bureau (NNMB) in particular. They have also analysed several determinants of nutrition transition that the country is undergoing but at the same time emphasizing that childhood nutrition should form the cornerstone of nutrition policy and therefore programmatic interventions. It is relevant in this context to link prescriptions of the World Bank (through their own research studies) to undermine the importance of feeding programmes within the umbrella of the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS). While Dilip Mahalanabis ('Micronutrient Malnutrition') argues that micronutrient deficiencies have social, personal and economic impacts, the chapter is silent on the determinants. Only rarely does micronutrient deficiency occur alone in an otherwise adequately nourished person. As he has amply argued, iron deficiency control programmes have often not translated to significant population level gains. Similarly there are debates on universal iodization programmes that are not reflected in this essay. The notion of 'multi-micronutrient mixture' at 'little extra cost' as research objective is interesting but should not detract attention from nutrition supplementation programmes that are increasingly facing cuts under the framework of 'new public health' or 'neo-liberal public health'.

The pre-independence era has been explored in this volume largely through the lens of communicable diseases that naturally dominated the public health scenario of that period.



Essays by Achintya Kumar Dutta ('Kala-Azar in Assam') and V.R. Muraleedharan ('"Cinchona" Policy in British India') deal with two specific diseases. Both these chapters are excellent in their narratives – exploring the experiences of both patients and providers. Two drugs – urea stibamine (for kala-azar) and quinine manufactured from cinchona (for malaria) raised great optimism; this was also the era of germ theory of disease aetiologies. The essays delve into historical material to reconstruct the challenges being faced by the then health planners and administrators to deliver these drugs to a population that was susceptible to a range of infections and at a time when the health services system was rudimentary in large parts of the country. 'Official policy' underwent swings and the political economy environment in which they operated has been analysed. These related issues of medical relief have been explored by Kabita Ray ('Press and Problem of Medical Relief in Colonial Bengal 1921-1947') in her analysis of the news items and editorials of the pint media – both vernacular and English. She has a wide array of subjects including health services, sanitation, medical education, financing and discrimination between Indian and British patients. The divide between the central and provincial and local governments have been brought out. She ends with the message that health issues and medical relief did not find adequate position in the mainstream political discourse.

Women's health issues have been addressed through two papers by C. Sathyamala ('Women's Health Movement in India') and Krishna Soman ('The Population Question in West Bengal'). Systematic reviews have been made of women's health movement issues in the country and population policies (of central and West Bengal governments). Detailed history of the debates around various contraceptives have been authoritatively dealt with by Sathyamala, giving the readers an inside view of the events since she has been one of the medical scientists who has been actively involved in these (and other) movements. Soman's paper is replete with data from West Bengal – both macro and micro levels and she has linked them deftly to models of governance. Sathyamala ends with an interesting question posed as a challenge to women's movements – double burden that women are now facing – increasing medical intervention for upper and middle class women (and iatrogenesis) and increasing 'no care' for their 'marginalised sisters'. Soman also ends with a concern for the 'marginalised sisters' of West Bengal (with over-representation by Adivasis and Dalits). While visualizing a central role for the state she also puts forth an interesting proposition that states and NGOs require to build up models of 'self reliance' that go beyond limited definitions offered by international donors.

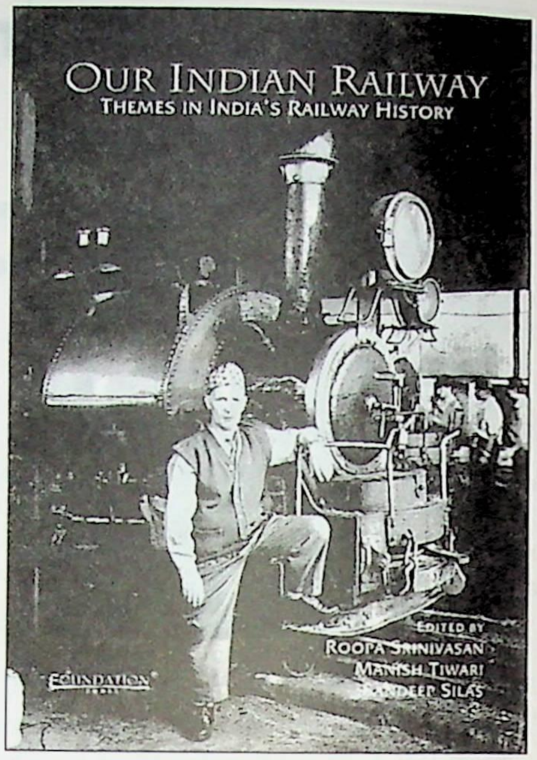
Imrana Qadeer's paper ('Continuities and Discontinuities in Public Health') traces the organizational aspects and dominant philosophies of public health over several periods of history. It links the two major sections of the book. She has traced the transition of public health from health services emerging from military to administrative needs to sanitary movements and impact of various new technologies in the pre-independence era to planned development and finally to the current phase of 'neo-liberal public health'. She has demonstrated the strands of continuity of the past in various facets of contemporary public health including dominance of the central government, medical education and the role and subsidization of the private sector. Critical changes are under way in the regime of globalization and privatization. Amit S. Ray ('The Indian Pharmaceutical Industry at the Crossroads') has the health care implications of these changes in the context of drugs. The central concern remains the maladies that the poor are increasingly facing owing to withdrawal of the state from the social sectors including health services. This volume has made an important contribution to public health literature in India and the interdisciplinary flavour has brought out the complexities.■

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Connecting With Wheels

V. Narayanan

OUR INDIAN RAILWAY
Edited by Roopa Srinivasan, Manish Tiwari and Sandeep Silas
Foundation Books, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 253, Rs. 650.00



With the book being dedicated to all those who love Indian Railways, the reviewer, who dreamt of being a railway man from childhood, was indeed excited. One cannot thus be faulted for looking forward to a series of articles that would take you through the evolution of railways in India breezily and positively. In the event one may be disappointed. Admittedly the editors could have a different opinion in this regard. They may argue that their effort is to address the serious reader/researcher/historian!

The pencil sketches that adorn the beginning of each article add a unique flavour to the presentation. Elsewhere it is mentioned that only a black and white presentation brings out the best in case of steam locomotives. One could easily extend this to the railway scenario too which these pictures attempt to portray.

The lengthy introduction summarizes each piece carried in the book. Reference to 9.13 million employees in Indian Railways may be a typographical error. But to call 1857 uprising as anything other than the First War of Independence, so referred to since 1950s in independent India, is unacceptable. Indeed as this is being written there is a call in the Lok Sabha to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the First War of Independence, in 2007, jointly with Pakistan and Bangladesh! India has also been referred to as an independent republic in 1947 when it still had only a dominion status, becoming a republic only in 1950!

The initial articles are largely critical of the decision to build railways at all in colonial India. When one has witnessed as recently as 80s and 90s the tremendous objection to extending railways to parts of Goa, one ought not to be surprised at the vehemence with which railways were opposed in its infancy in 19th century India. With the reputation of the colonial power and its scarcely concealed effort to ensure markets for British products such antipathy from well-intentioned thinkers was to be expected. The book thus provides well-reasoned articles on the subject. Add to this the shabby way Indian unskilled workers were treated with hardly any concern for their well-being due to which innumerable workers died of diseases the strong feelings expressed in the first few articles are understandable. I have heard of an eminent railway man, while inaugurating a facility recently, dedicate it to the hapless thousands who perished in mid-19th century as they toiled in impossible conditions to build railways in inhospitable conditions. Moreover, ease of transportation and better prices elsewhere caused shortages in areas near growers.

Dipesh Chakrbarty's piece has obviously to do with the larger issue of Bengali renaissance but he successfully argues as to how a section of the society influenced and helped the arrival of railways in India.

The July 4, 1850 Minute by Lord Dalhousie as reproduced in its entirety makes for very interesting reading. A variety of railway related issues including as technical an issue as the gauge to be adopted has been covered. No doubt the laudable intention of avoidance of multiplicity of gauges had to be given up rather early owing to mounting construction costs, metre gauge proving cheaper. This issue has relevance even today. It is expected that only by 2008 or so the metre gauge would be eliminated in Indian railways except for the Nilgiri Mountain Railway. So it has taken over a century to realize the dreams of Lord Dalhousie! As to cost even now it is felt that broad gauge is costlier; for example one of the reasons why Bangalore metro has opted for standard gauge (4' 8½"/1435 mm) is that land acquisition costs would be cheaper than 5' 6" (1676 mm) gauge. The issue's longevity cannot be doubted!

The chapter entitled 'Economic Nationalism and the Railway Debate, circa 1880-1905' runs through the entire gamut of opinion and makes for very valuable reading. It dwells at length as to the views of several well-informed thinkers who questioned the wisdom of railways as it was being built then. The method of funding was systematically attacked by a wide variety of nationalistic thinkers. They questioned the very premise of building railways at what is referred to as "American speed". The method to raise the capital was sought to be debated questioning the expectation of very substantial guaranteed return on capital. This, it is pointed out, helps to give the go by to ordinary prudence in the matter of investments. In any case opinion after opinion reiterates the view that railways were indeed being built more to serve colonial needs. It is pointed out that it would have helped to create a market for the colonial power's engineering industry such as steel and machinery. And the benefits sought to be attributed to the rapid growth of railway network are questioned. It is pointed out that the railway network did not really help the Indian poor, as prices were not contained once the market widened. The article, however, seeks to point out that what was objected to was foreign capital, viz., guaranteed return was indeed recommended by a leading Indian newspaper for Indian capital!

In the concluding part the seemingly wanton neglect of irrigation in favour of railways is severely objected to by many serious thinkers. It is felt that improved irrigation and sustained inputs thereto was the need of the hour. Moreover irrigation provided large job opportunities for Indians in contrast to railways which provided jobs to folks in the country of origin of the imported engineering goods. It is good that the editors found a place for this article in the book. A reader gets rare insight into the advanced thinking that had prevailed in the early days of railway construction.

Railway policing may have its special features that may appeal to the researcher in policing—it is obvious that the writer is doing even more work in policing in North India—but in a book on railways it seems incongruous. I'd take the liberty of passing over this piece.

When editors with a particular outlook select articles for publication in a book the risk of finding articles with a similar story line being repeated is unavoidable. Thus 'Indian nationalism and Railways' begins with a repeat of the contents of "Economic Nationalism and the Railway Debate, 1880-1905". Thankfully the presentation moves over to railway labour union and the founding fathers of Independent India and their penchant for sending a political message even if it proved to be somewhat costly. It is interesting to note that even Nehru found

it necessary to adopt 3rd class travel even though he may not have agreed with the need for it! In conclusion this piece brings out the part played by railways in the Quit India Movement highlighting *inter alia* the symbiotic relationship that followed between congressmen and revolutionaries on the one hand and the railways on the other!

Iftekhar Iqbal's article, 'The Railway in Colonial India: Between Ideas and Impacts' dwells on the nature of damage inflicted on a fragile system of drainage of some 47 rivers in northern Bengal by railway embankments and its impact on agriculture, prices etc. Truly the railways had adversely affected tens of thousands of lives and livelihoods. The clever interplay between some interested Indian elite and the colonial powers, has also been highlighted.

Ian J. Kerr's piece entitled the 'The Dark Side of the Force' makes for revealing at the same time distressing reading. Well-researched data brings to the fore glaring instances of favouritsm in the matter of award of contracts mulcting, in the process, the railway establishments. It is known that the payers of money do not give out of their profit but by cutting corners. The article also highlights innumerable instances of failed works although in this context ignorance is cited as the reason. Could it also have been due to shoddy work? One cannot fail to observe that the foundations for such corrupt practices had been established even as early as the 18th century. Over the next century and a half, these practices have been perfected. Recently vast sums of money from relatively junior police officials, accountants etc. have been unearthed even today in Karnataka close to 60 years after Independence. Ian Kerr has pointed out that his examples do not mean that corrupt practices were peculiar to the railway he was analysing and goes on to say that it equally applicable to East Indian Railway, Madras Railway etc. Similarly the reference to Karnataka earlier does not mean that corrupt practices are limited to this state. It is a sad fact that it is endemic in India.

Peter Morey's comparative piece on two English novels by people of Indian stock, in the context of the dark days of Partition set in a railway ambience forms a good part of this book. In a few months in 1946/7, India claiming to have a 5000-year civilization behind it went berserk. The all-encompassing railway's role in the books is enthralling for the railway aficionado. It was a time too that railways employing some one million persons was a large institution playing a vital role in people's lives. The tragedy of Partition is brought out vividly in Kushwant Singh's *Train To Pakistan*. The human conflict having a bearing on India's history post-Independence is brought out in bold relief in John Master's *Bhowani Junction*. Did the Indian Railways with its innate characteristic of welding the nation by bringing together different peoples have a bearing in the way India withstood the cataclysmic events then? This reviewer would like to think so.

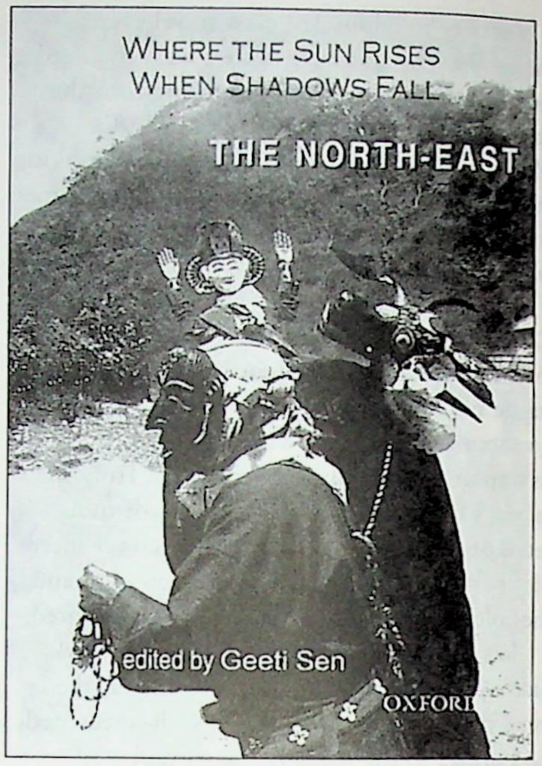
Finally we reach the most endearing part of the book ending with Sir Mark Tully's piece and the photo essay. Sir Mark's account is balanced. While agreeing with the view that railways were in fact a creation to meet the needs of the colonial regime, he suggests India gained too. He'd have been happier if Indians had been allowed to build a few thousand locomotives instead of building a few hundreds and importing 12000! He refers to the ease and safety with which pilgrims could visit far flung temples and sacred rivers. He says too that railways have improved internal commerce and trade. It is not clear if this piece was specially scripted for this book.

For the reviewer who is a railway mechanical engineer the photo essay forms the icing on the cake. They are a set of lovely pictures.■

V. Narayanan, AGM (Retd.) SE Rly started as an apprentice in Indian Railways in 1956 and retired after 39 years of service.

Showcasing of a Marginalized Region

Amit Prakash



WHERE THE SUN RISES, WHEN SHADOWS FALL: THE NORTH-EAST
Edited by Geeti Sen
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 306, Rs. 675.00

The volume under review is an unusual one. It covers a vast sweep of issues and topics – from culture to politics, from patterns of social transformation to contested identities and from myths creation to poetic sensibilities – all related to Northeast India. The purpose of the volume is not to further the boundaries of research on Northeast India but to provide a showcase of the variety of patterns in the socio-economic, cultural and political life of a much ignored region of the country.

The volume is a collection of stories and poetry (all ably translated from various languages of the region into English), essays, narratives, and analyses about various states, issues and facets of the Northeast written by authorities in their respective fields. The book is divided into five major sections dealing with various aspects of the region. The first section on *Oral Narratives*, has been "assembled by Mamang Devi, herself a poet and author of distinction" (p. viii). This section records the oral tradition from the eight states by presenting vibrant tales of the myth of creation through the avenues of "extensive research, translation and documentation" (ibid.). These myths permeate everyday life in the region and are indispensable to the understanding of the cultural milieu and the socio-psychological constructs of the individual viewpoint in the region while presenting a picture of a world in complete harmony with nature. These stories and myths are fundamental to the contours of identity of the communities of the Northeast, laying down as they do, the boundaries of the communities themselves. It is also important to stress two aspects of these stories: first, these "stories did not come into minds of men like a bolt of lightening" (p. 6.) but are products of generations of lived experience. In this respect, they are reservoirs of human experience of the region and incorporate all aspects of human endeavour – from valour to sorrow, from victory to defeat and from wisdom to human apathy towards nature. This discussion therefore opens a new window to the Northeast.

Second, it must also be underlined that while many of the stories presented in the volume document the unique human experience of the Northeast, the underlying thread of human concerns resonates rather closely with the myths of creation in many other cultures. Undoubtedly, the details and nuances differ but the fundamental thread of similarity is unmistakable.

The second section collated by Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih presents a collection of Contemporary Poetry from the region—unpublished poems which address widely different issues from needless violence and terror that has unfortunately become an everyday occurrence in the region to the issues of everyday existence such as corruption. While "modern poetry in the region could be found mostly in the free verse of Bengali, Assamese, Manipuri and those of tribal poets of the different states" (p. 41), many of these poets are widely exposed to the literary developments in much of the world. Therefore, contemporary poetry of the Northeast engages with a multitude of themes and "passionately grapple with some of the psychological and social difficulties of present-day life" (ibid.). Further, while the local texture is retained by most poets, there is indeed an underlying similarity in the writings of the poets of the region in their rootedness in their local environs, in their 'chronicling' of the conflicts, in their effort to offer a weapon in the fight against corruption and to capture the multi-layered complexity of human relationship and quest for change.

Highly stirring stories by Nini Lungalang, Temsula Ao and Ayinla Shilu Ao comprise the third section entitled *Cultures in Transition*. These stories narrate how the cultural aspects of life in the Northeast have been transformed by focussing on the Mizos, the Nagas, the Khasis, the Apa Tanis and the Buddhist monks. Each of these narratives signifies the various avenues through which the cultural world of the Northeast has interacted with a changing environ leading to new patterns of cultural expressions. In addition to the narrative accounts of other authors, the photo-essay by Pablo Bartholomew offers a stark pictorial account of the cultural transition that Naga society has undergone. Similarly, the photo-essay by Geeti Sen on the various aspects related to the Twang monastery offers unparallelled insight into the transition being experienced by the region.

The fourth section entitled *Conflict of Identities* explores the vexed and complex issue of identities in this region. Issues of relationship between identities of self, state, centre and organized religion and the variety of fluid contestations that these throw up have been analysed in this section. Essays by Sanjib Baruah, Patricia Mukhim and Harekrishna Deka offer insightful and thoroughgoing analyses of these complex questions while the essay by Mona Zote delineates the conflict between the personal identities and those being created in politics infused by organized religion. Preeti Gill takes up the relatively under-researched but central issue of women in conflict situations which abound in this region. This section also employs a rather unusual technique of exploring questions of identity by presenting Ratan Thiyam's dialogue with Geeti Sen and Kavita Nagpal on reinvention of tradition through performance.

The last section entitled *The Politics of Dissent* presents analytical essays by the major authors on the region – Sanjoy Hazarika on the multiple roles of contest and cooperation that are played by the Brahmaputra river; Charles Chasie on the transitions that Nagaland is undergoing; Udayon Misra on the contest between marginalized Northeast and the sovereign Indian state; and, Pradip Phanjoubam on the multiple lines of discontent and contests in Manipur. This section also presents Indira Goswami's dialogue with Sanjoy Hazarika and Geeti Sen on the lines and reasons of dissent and the possible avenues for a durable peace.

The discussion in this section of the volume offers a perceptive analysis of the contours of contests emerging in the Northeast. Sanjib Baruah analyses the emerging divide between the Northeast and the rest of India, rooted in

The book does not aspire to be an original academic contribution to the analyses of the issues and problems of the Northeast. Hence, it does not break any new analytical ground. A reader aspiring for a new approach or analysis on the issues of the region would be grossly disappointed.

physical characteristics and acquiring a racial turn. This emerging 'racism' is buttressed by the police and army-led response of the Indian state to the complex issues of identity, resource contest and marginalization of the region.

The contributions by Misra and Deka underline the patterns of continuity between the Northeast and rest of India, embedded as it is in long traditions of cultural experience. However, recent political patterns – aggravated by the miseries of Partition, threats from migration, and, poor and insensitive handling – do not bode well for the possibility of stability and peace in the region, not to mention the increasing distrust of the Union government. Drawing from her long experience of interaction with ULFA, Indira Goswami offers her candid assessment of the causes of militancy and their relationship with the ground reality – an issue which is often ignored by the policy process of the Indian state. Last but not the least, Ratan Thiyam's insightful exploration of multiple identities, their engagement with the political and the transformation of Manipuri martial and folk art into art forms of universal appeal nicely rounds off the volume's task of offering a wide window into the multifaceted region.

The book does not aspire to be an original academic contribution to the analyses of the issues and problems of the Northeast. Hence, it does not break any new analytical ground. A reader aspiring for a new approach or analysis on the issues of the region would be grossly disappointed. However, much of the misinformation and thereby stereotyping of the Northeast is rooted in its physical inaccessibility and thereby the poor levels of knowledge about the region amongst most of Indian populace, the state included. If this volume is able to remove some of the misperceptions about the Northeast, it would do a lasting service to both the Northeast as well as India as a whole.■

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An Empirical Account

Meena Bhargava

POPULAR CULTURE AND RELIGION IN MEDIEVAL INDIA
By Victor Babu
Kaveri Books, New Delhi, 2005, pp. vi+240, Rs. 475.00

The book, an empirical account of popular culture and religion in medieval Andhradesa attempts theoretical analysis but does not offer much. The Introduction in the book is rather confusing. In barely four pages the author mentions the importance of studying and applying the methodology of Marxism, Annales, Subaltern, Focault, folk songs and folk tales. However, he fails to relate them to his work or explain how the use of these methodologies has enriched his study of popular culture and religion in medieval Andhra. Chapter 1 entitled 'Popular Culture in Medieval Context' is quite a dissatisfying attempt to theorize "popular" and "culture". It would have been more appropriate had the author introduced the reader to the historiography and characteristics of medieval Andhra before embarking on a discussion of its beliefs, customs and traditions.

Discussing the varieties and appropriation of popular culture by the people, the author observes that the social format of medieval Andhradesa was extremely complex. Although Brahmanism was dominant in coastal Andhra, proliferation of castes remained a significant feature of medieval Andhra society. He also describes several religious sects like Veerasaivism which emerged in Karnataka in the twelfth century. Pluralism, Babu argues, characterized the religious life of the people. They worshipped and propitiated *gramadevatas* or village deities, believing that the *gramadevatas* were their sole protector against evil spirits and evil effects and guarded their land and property against natural calamities. Amongst these village deities, the most popular ones were *Ellamma*, the Goddess who blessed barren women with children and also protected children from diseases; *Posamma*, the Goddess of smallpox and *Poturaja*, which was represented by a small stone, placed at some distance from the shrine of the village Goddess. It was believed that *Poturaja* "flogs and whips those who don't fulfil the vows taken" (p. 31). He was generally worshipped by the Andhra tribals. Apart from these, the people deified the dead, worshipped nature like trees and snakes and also worshipped their *kuladevatas* or caste deities. Self torture and self immolation prevailed largely among the *Saivites* (devotees of Lord Shiva) who regarded these as an expression of their faith and sincerity towards their deity. Yet another kind of self immolation was *sati sahagamana* (burning of the widows on the funeral pyre of their husbands), practised by all women except pregnant women or mothers of young children as "religious merit... to the departed soul" (p. 35). Worship of sufi saints in medieval Andhra cut across all religious distinctions. It was believed that sufi saints, endowed with supernatural powers, could protect against evil spirits, illnesses and discard any evil influences.

The attempt to sanskritize local forest and village deities led to a number of myths and legends in medieval Andhra. To explain the myths of *Mala Dasari*, *Narasimha*, *Ellamma*, *Posamma* and the legend of *Kannappa*, Babu quotes verses extensively. These verses, however, are so overwhelming that one can barely understand the depth and significance of these myths and legends.

Popular culture in medieval Andhra, Babu observes, found expression in performance and entertainment by professional groups. These performances were religious and ritualistic and took the form of narratives or ballads of which some significant ones were *Jangam Katha*, *Asadi Katha*, *Jamakula Katha* etc.; dance forms such as *Kolattam* and theatre forms like *Yakshaganam* and *Tolubommalata*.

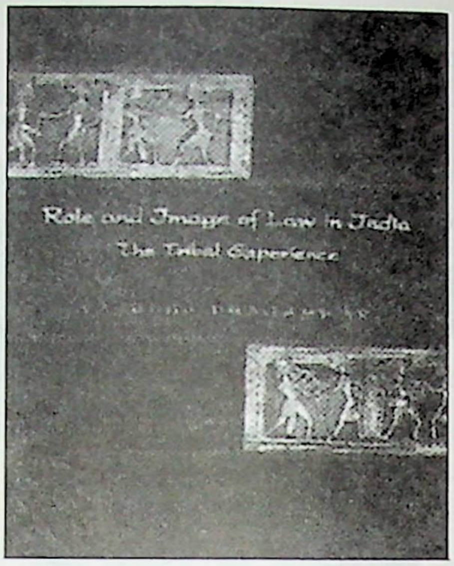
Chapter 6 of the book entitled 'Power Relations within the State Structure' stands superfluous. It does not connect to the larger theme of the book on popular culture and religion. The author, instead, could have elaborated on the theories on popular culture, which are rather unsatisfactory in the book. Secondly, the characteristics of medieval Andhra could have been explained in the larger theoretical framework of popular culture and religion in medieval India. This would have also justified the title of the book, which is rather misleading. For harmony between the title and the text of the book, a subtitle would have been desirable.■

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Postcolonial Trials and Tribulations

M.S. Ganesh

ROLE AND IMAGE OF LAW IN INDIA: THE TRIBAL EXPERIENCE
By Vasudha Dhagamvar
Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 415, Rs. 695.00



"To enter the phase of post-colonialism the tribes will first have to become state powers.... If so, then 8.08 per cent share in the total population of India is not a negligible number" (p. 379). Dhagamwar's concluding lines in the book under review deflate an otherwise compassionate and edifying work on certain tribes and their tribulations since the colonial era: the Pahadiyas of the Rajmahal Hills, the Santals of the Santal Parganas, both originally in Bihar and now in Jharkhand, and the Bhils of north-western Maharashtra.

In her introduction, Dhagamwar delineates the premises of her study: the geographic and cultural isolation of the tribes from settled society; the law as comprising both specific legal situations and the legal system, i.e., the police, lawyers, the courts and jails; the tribe's unawareness of its own history resulting in loss of its identity and culminating in Verrier Elwin's "loss of nerve" and attendant consequences; and the focus on land and criminal matters as "these two areas of law are the only ones that matter to tribes" (pp. 12-13, 16-17). Then comes a perfunctory preliminary chapter that ends, "In all its aspects, the relationship between tribes and civil society in ancient and medieval India was that of convenience. Law, as we understand it, had little to do with it" (p. 36).

Dhagamwar's conceptual underpinnings are rather shaky. Her historical-legal Indian paradigm of the Last of the Mohicans does not delineate the –or her—conception of a tribe. She does not cite the Criminal Tribes Act 1871 or mention the so-called Denotified and Nomadic Tribes who still suffer the iniquities of their original branding under that legislation. The essential features of a tribe are the bonds of kinship and the co-ownership of material resources of their community, i.e., trees, wells, lakes, rivers, fish, and agricultural land that constitute their relations of production. Tribal society is untrammelled by elites, hierarchies, and institutions of governance that impel the making of written records and render feasible a state organization.[1] Only those tribes were listed in the constitutional Schedule who suffered isolation, and cultural and geographic isolation is not an essential feature of tribal life. Dhagamwar concedes that "we have access only to non-tribal sources on tribal people" (p. 19). She also says that the image of the law relates to what is expected of it (p. 350). If that be so, her approach is an attribution to the tribes of what she thinks they think and expect of the law and the legal system, without any written, concerted articulation of their supposed perception. This approach does less than justice to the tribes and is fraught with dangerous appropriation of thought. For instance, it should have been made more clear that tribal society is face-to-face, small-scale society, and that group decisions are made more by consensus than by majority vote. We miss a thoroughgoing discussion of how these tribal societies settled their own conflicts, and the norms that were in place regarding the communal use of nature's wealth. There is no question of there being a codified and overarching system of law in tribal tradition— any codified system would be an alien imposition for them.

The substantive study is in two parts: Part I (Chapters 2 to 7): "Tribes in British India"; and Part II (Chapters 8 to 12): "Tribes in Independent India".

Part I, the core of the book, is a historical though discursive survey of the subjugation and marginalization of each of the tribes, in turn. Its signal contribution lies in Dhagamwar's research into and use of material from the unpublished records of the East India Company. It is doubtful, however, whether that material would qualify as ethnography, legal or otherwise, as claimed in the blurb.

After a decade-long (1773 onwards) vanquishment, the Pahadiyas of the Jungleterry also suffered forfeit of their territory to British *lebenstraum*. "The Pahadiyas were unable to learn the rules of the new legal system or of a monetary economy. That is why they perished cheaply" (p. 111). "Settlement did not merely take away their lands from the Pahadiyas. It brought in another momentous change—*it made land into a commodity*. Land could now be sold or attached for recovery of a debt" (p. 115—author's emphasis). From 1818 onwards the Bhils of Khandesh were subjugated in much the same way. As for the Santals of the Jungleterry, to cut a long story short, "In 1793 the Permanent Settlement had delivered the tenants over to the zamindar. In 1872 the Santal Parganas Settlement might have rescued him from the zamindar but it had put him firmly into the clutches of the money lender" (p. 192).

Part II finds Dhagamwar as a legal activist—more power to her. She presents four case studies which are really in the nature of subaltern studies. In two of these she is the protagonist. In one case, the vesting of lands in Bhil tillers in Akkalkua, Dhule District was sought to be defeated by a landlord who challenged the constitutional validity of statutory provisions making the cultivators the deemed purchasers of these lands. In another case, a criminal trial of four Pahadiyas was expedited after a decade of their languishing in prison and they were acquitted and later awarded compensation by the Supreme Court. The third case relates to the Santal customary law of condign punishment called *bitlaha* by which an offender's property is defiled and damaged (without touching the person) and the fourth to the tortuous processes of criminal trials in the sessions courts that help only those who can manipulate the system.

The copy-editing of the book leaves much to be desired. First, the text should have been made more concise. Secondly, there is little, if any, complementarity between Parts I and II: they belong to different genres. Part II could have been excised to form a separate volume without detracting from the value of Part I. Besides, there are: misspellings, malapropisms (e.g., "invalidated out of the army" p. 74), misnomers ("limerick" instead of quatrain p. 105) and faulty grammar.

A final poser: apropos her thesis, what would Dhagamwar now have to say about Chattisgarh, to which she refers *en passant* (p. 351), and the Salwa Judum?

Reference

[1] The reader is referred to, e.g.: R. Deliege, *The Bhils of Western India* (1985); M. Miri (ed.), *Continuity and Change in Tribal Society* (1993); A. Baviskar, *In the Belly of the River* (1995); and S. Ratnagar, *The Other Indians: Essays on Pastoralists and Prehistoric Tribal People* (2004).

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A Hermit in Texas*

By Meenakshi Mukherjee

It was in the mid-nineteen seventies during my very first teaching assignment abroad that I had this memorable encounter with Raja Rao. My doctoral dissertation had appeared as book a few years earlier in which Raja Rao was one of the major writers discussed. I suspect it was on the basis of that book on Indian novels in English that I was invited to teach a course in the University of Texas at Austin. I knew Raja Rao taught Indian Philosophy in the same university and had planned to get in touch with him as soon as I settled down. I was going to be there for the entire semester – so there was no hurry. Going to see Raja Rao would be for me like making a pilgrimage – I wanted to do that in a duly reverential frame of mind. But before the first week was over I had a phone call at my office – a gentle voice introducing himself as Raja Rao and welcoming me to Austin. He said he learnt about my arrival from the campus newspaper and wanted to meet me because he had read my book. I was quite overwhelmed. Nothing like this had ever happened to me. He suggested lunch at his place on Saturday. He said he did not own a car so I would have to take a taxi and gave me the address. This was the first surprise. I did not know that there were university professors in the US who did not drive. The second surprise came when I reached my destination on Saturday and saw the way he lived. His apartment was literally one room on top of someone's garage with a small kitchen and a dining alcove – all sparsely furnished. The room had a single bed and a desk – one bookshelf and a couple of chairs—no carpet on the floor.

We sat on those two straight-backed chairs and he narrated stories of his life to an eager wide-eyed listener. It was a rare privilege to be sitting with a man whom I had studied in such detail and written about. I had read everything he had written at that point of time (I must confess later I slipped up) and hung on to each word uttered by him. He pointed to his wife's photograph on the wall who looked to me like Virginia Woolf. She was an actress in New York, he said and their only son Krishna was with her. To me Raja Rao seemed like a hermit living in austerity to pursue a higher metaphysical quest, oblivious of the consumerism that marked American life. 'How do you manage without a car?' I ventured to ask during a brief pause in his monologue. In my one week of stay I had already experienced the difficulties of being car-less in an automobile centred world `How do you buy your groceries and vegetables, for example?' Almost immediately I was ashamed of the triviality of my question. He spread out his hands and looked upwards: 'God provides'. As if to give substance to his claim, a young man, perhaps one of his students, walked in at some point during my visit with two bananas and three lemons. He came quietly, put the stuff on the dining table and departed without any exchange of words. It was like a silent movie.

When we moved to the dining space, I found the table already set—two large plates and two side plates with appropriate cutlery. I was quite touched that a great man like him had taken the trouble to cook for me, and particularly moved because he was so old. Actually now I realize he was not all that ancient—he must have been in his sixties but from my early thirties perspective he seemed like a venerable old sage. He put some lettuce on the side plate and said 'Let us start.' While I faithfully munched the unadorned lettuce, he told me in a pleasant conversational manner, almost affectionately 'I like what you have written about *Kanthapura* but when you discuss *The Serpent and The Rope* you have been unfair to me. At one place where you say I am transferring my expatriate nostalgia for Indian rituals on to my character Savithri'. For those who have not read *The Serpent and the Rope* recently I think I need to explain the context. In his novel, Savithri, a rebellious nonconformist student at Cambridge University falls in love with Ramaswamy, the hero of the novel. In his hotel room in London she washes Ramaswamy's feet and anoints them; performs *arati* three times places her head on his feet and says "I have known my Lord for a thousand lives, from *janam* to *janam* I have known my Krishna." What I had the audacity to say about this symbolic equation of human love with the adoration of Krishna by Radha was that such an act does not fit in with Savithri's character as it is depicted so far—who unlike most Indian women asserts her own will and has already refused her family's attempts at an arranged marriage. I had gone on to say, "It is arguable therefore that the fond description of these rituals has its birth in the sentimental longing of the author himself who has lived abroad for a long time and sees all traditional Indian acts through a mist of longing."

I do not know why the great man should have bothered about what some unknown young critic wrote about his novel, but he seemed genuinely concerned about justifying himself. He began to persuade me that this is how all Indian women behave when they are in love. "Every woman in love becomes Radha and a complete surrender of one's self is something that is part of an Indian woman's psyche. She likes to serve her beloved. Think of Meera's song *mujhe chakar rakho ji*—and that is what makes an Indian woman so unique."

You must remember the time was the nineteen seventies and the feminist ideology was a new faith for some of us. I argued with him — not aggressively—I was his guest after all—but politely I expressed my unease about essentializing Indian womanhood. By that time I had polished off the lettuce and had started wondering when the next course would come. He went to the kitchen and brought out a bowl of white rice and both of us served ourselves. Naively, I thought something else will follow—either sambar or vegetables but he sat down comfortably and resumed the argument. He told me I was not like the other academic women he sees in USA—I was very Indian and I must not lose that essence of femininity. He ate the plain rice with relish and I bravely followed his example secretly wishing I could have some butter or salt to make it palatable. But these were mundane thoughts. Shamefacedly I brushed them aside as he went on about the divine status of a woman in Indian society. I kept up my end of the debate trying to tell him that a human status would really be quite enough for the time being. But it was an unequal argument because he was charming, erudite and eloquent and I was not only awkward but also in great awe of him.

After all these years I cannot recall what else we talked about at lunch but I do remember very well that when we finished I picked up the plates and offered to wash them. This, it seemed to me was the least I could do after he had taken so much trouble for me. He beamed at me triumphantly and said—"There you are, the Indian woman all over!" Evidently for him my gesture of help clinched the argument in his favour.

Since then I have met him quite a few times and each time we got into a debate over something or the other—about brahminism or gender issues. Over the years I acquired a little more confidence but he continued to be indulgent towards me and seemed amused that instead of behaving like a humble disciple—something he was used to—I had the presumption to argue with him. He lived on a higher intellectual and philosophical plane and could easily have dismissed people like me who knew much less and lived in a limited world.But I think it was a measure of his generosity that he had time for even those who disagreed with him. I like to remember him not only as an major writer of the twentieth century but also as a humane individual who was gracious enough to encourage a fledgling academic many years ago.

*This piece was written for a memorial meeting "Remembering Raja Rao" held in Hyderabad on July 25, 2006.

Shakespeare and India or India's Shakespeare?

Paromita Chakravarti

INDIA'S SHAKESPEARE: TRANSLATION, INTERPRETATION AND PERFORMANCE
Edited by Poonam Trivedi and Dennis Bartholomeusz
Pearson/ Longman, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 270, Rs. 399.00

In the last three decades Shakespeare studies and postcolonial studies have not only been intimately linked, they have also been mutually constitutive. An important strand of postcolonial studies has investigated how the English literary canon dominated by Shakespeare performed the ideological work of reinforcing the cultural superiority of the British colonizer. It has also mapped the diversity of attitudes ranging from the deferential to the subversive which have marked the postcolonial response to Shakespeare's plays (and metonymically to colonial culture). Indian translations, adaptations and appropriations read Shakespeare not only as an English cultural icon but as a radical dramatist providing templates of resistance through plays like *The Tempest* and *Othello*. Shakespeare has been central to postcolonial studies and theory both as a symbol of the colonizer's authority and also as a site of postcolonial challenge. Equally, the critical discourse on postcolonial Shakespearean negotiations has alerted Shakespearean scholars to pay greater attention to the ideological framework of early modern colonialisms, emergent notions of racial and cultural difference and of Englishness which inform Shakespeare's plays and make them appropriate vehicles of both the "civilizing mission" of the colonizers and the resistance of the colonized.

Postcolonial theory provided both a framework for and a legitimacy to studies of Shakespearean transactions in India. Indian Shakespeare studies found a vantage point and a voice. However this symbiotic relationship between Shakespeare and postcolonial studies now needs to be reexamined, particularly in the Indian context. Poonam Trivedi and Dennis Bartholomeusz edited *India's Shakespeare: Translation, Interpretation and Performance* engages in this project. This anthology of fifteen articles generated from the presentations made in the 1998 "Shakespeare and India" conference held in Delhi has had a long gestation during which it has transformed itself into a study of *India's Shakespeare.* The difference in the title of the conference and of the book is not just accidental. It indicates a shift in postcolonial Shakespeare studies from what Sharmistha Panja, one of the contributors to the volume, calls the impulse to make "a statement about or against Shakespeare" to a "second generation postcoloniality" which regards Shakespeare not necessarily as a colonizing, alien force, but as an author internalized and familiarized through culture and pedagogy. This journey marked by a transition from a copula to a possessive is also connected to new debates in postcolonial studies.

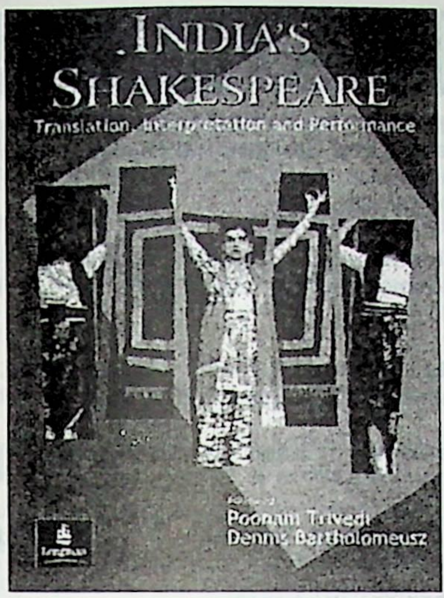
Critics have pointed out that the model of colonial cultural exchange understood primarily through notions of authority, domination and hegemony are not always adequate to understand the complexity of these Shakespearean transactions, particularly the more recent ones. The peculiar investment of the Indian student, scholar, playwright or performer in Shakespeare studies cannot be fully grasped even through ideas of ambivalence, hybridity and mimicry. Shakespeare has stood for and continues to represent not just high culture, but also modernity, liberal values, internationalism and all the empowering possibilities of English education, in colonial times, as well as now. Perhaps postcolonial critics should pay more attention to some of the curriculum wars that were fought in several Indian universities in the late nineties. In many of these debates, the pressures to modernize the syllabus pitted traditional Eng.lit strongholds like Shakespeare studies against more contemporary, "new-fangled" theoretical subjects like postcolonial studies. For a vast number of scholars and teachers working in India Shakespeare's works, familiarized through two centuries of colonial pedagogy appeared much more accessible than postcolonial theory which seemed an alien and alienating subject threatening to destabilize the comforts of traditional English literary studies through its obfuscatory rhetoric in books most Indians could not afford.

Indeed postcolonial theory is largely generated under the aegis of Anglo-American academies by a group of highly visible and highly regarded Third World intellectuals who formulate our postcoloniality for us in a way that many of us find unsuitable, even counter-productive. In their introduction, Trivedi and Bartholemeusz point out how some post-colonial studies of Indian Shakespearean appropriations fail to engage seriously with the specificities of Indian cultural forms. Their agenda, set by western academics is often more interested in propping up predetermined theoretical principles. Cavalier disregard for original sources, a homogenizing (even neo-orientalist) attitude towards different postcolonial societies and the nuances of their indigenous and local culture characterize some of this critical work. Perhaps, India remains something of an indeterminate location, a site of unspecified "otherness" even within postcolonial studies as it did in the Shakespearean imagination as demonstrated in Sukanta Chaudhuri's article, "Shakespeare's India".

The reason a lot of sloppy postcolonial scholarship goes unchallenged is because a comparable body of indigenous critical discourse is not easily available. There is a need to build a national archive of colonial Shakespearean transactions which would include contemporary reviews, records of performances, criticism, pedagogical material, translations, discussions and interpretations. More recent critical material should also be collected and made accessible to the growing body of researchers in this subject. *India's Shakespeare* takes a timely step in the right direction by providing a good mix of articles focusing on a range of issues: stage history, textual criticism, performance reviews and studies of linguistic and cultural translation in colonial and postcolonial India.

The longest section of the book consisting of seven essays discusses Shakespearean productions from different centuries and from various parts of India, in diverse forms and genres. The obvious emphasis on performance and performance history is in tune with the postcolonial project of challenging the logocentricity of Shakespearean texts through adaptations, translations and reworkings. While the Shakespearean text can act as a colonial imposition, it is on the stage that Shakespeare can be freely "played" and played with. Ananda Lal in his essay entitled "Re-creating *The Merchant of Venice* on the Indian stage: A Director's Note" reiterates the need to take Shakespeare outside the classroom and to teach him as a dramatist rather than a poet.

The performance section maps the diversity of forms, genres, languages and registers of Shakespearean production and appropriation in India spanning high and low, classical and folk, elite and popular cultures. These articles alert us to the developing tradition of indigenization and the emergence of what Poonam Trivedi has described as a *desi* Shakespeare who ubiquitously inhabits English language, collegiate, amateur theatre, folk forms of *Chau*, *nautanki*, *sangeet nataka*, Kannada puppet theatre, song-and dance extravaganzas of Parsi theatre, ritualistic *kathakali* or *yakshagana* forms and even Hindi cinema. But this marks not so much the "universalism" of Shakespeare as an attempt to turn the gaze inwards and examine how deeply embedded Shakespeare is in Indian culture, not just in an English educated, middle-class milieu as was the case in the colonial period, but much more pervasively, in



unacknowledged ways in contemporary Indian poplar culture. The "second generation post-colonials" are less interested in "writing back" and providing ever expanding circles of Shakespearean interpretation. They are more focused on exploring Indian culture(s) in the light of their Shakespearean negotiations. In this context Harish Trivedi's article on the role played by *Romeo and Juliet* and its reworkings in translating notions of western love into Indian culture, Rajiv Verma's examination of how Shakespearean romantic comedy provides Hindi cinema with a useful template for sex comedy as well as a storehouse of plots and characters and Poonam Trivedi's analysis of how traditional folk forms achieve a new flexibility and modernity in their experiments with Shakespearean themes are important contributions.

Whether Europe is provincialized or not, Shakespeare certainly needs to be more localized. This can only be done by developing methodologies of understanding our Shakespearean negotiations which would be more nuanced and sensitive to local performative and critical traditions than those emanating out of western campuses. This however is not to make a case for a ghettoized, ethnicized, nativist Shakespeare studies. Postcolonial Shakespearean studies also needs to question whether in an increasingly globalized world we should continue to think of Shakespeare as a purely British icon or as an international dramatist. Should our Shakespearean negotiations still be seen in terms of the colonial encounter or should they be understood through new theoretical paradigms?

But even as we contemplate the limitations of postcolonial models we need to be aware and wary of the various ways in which neocolonialism perpetuates older power inequities. Shakespeare studies still continues to be dominated by the Anglophone world, by institutions such as the Folger and the Royal Shakespeare Company, by western publishers like Routledge, Cambridge and Oxford University Presses and by an academic market which is still primarily in the West although the demand for material from the "Third World", ex-colonies and "the East" is on the rise. Much as it is welcome, one wonders whether the support from the Australian Research Council which had funded the original conference on "Shakespeare and India" continues to be crucial to the project of setting forth "India's Shakespeare". Much as we appreciate the solidarity of postcolonial societies we must be fully aware of the differences between Australia and India in terms of power equations and alliances with the West.■

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The Naïve Poet-Traveller

Jane Bhandari

LAST BUS TO VASCO
By Brian Mendonça
Brian Mendonça, Department of Information and Publicity, Government of Goa, Notes with Line Breaks, pp. 68, Rs. 150.00

I visited Goa shortly after receiving *Last Bus to Goa*, and sat on the beach under a rain-threatening sky to read:

Like a slate of grey
The sea stretches
To meet the sky.
The horizon blurs
As the dawn
Swollen with rain
Douses the sun…

('Velsao')

Brian Mendonca's work occupies the same space in poetry that naïve paintings occupy in art. They are not so much poems as notes with line breaks – yet they have all the charm of naïve paintings. The language and the images are simple, and there is no indication that the poems have been in any way edited since the first draft. In fact, at an early pre-publication reading, I had asked him whether he ever revised any of his works. No, he said, I never revise them, they would lose their freshness if I did. Once done, he said, they are done. While I personally feel that a number of the poems could do with judicious pruning, it is probably true that, as in an oil painting, reworking them might well leave them with a muddy texture. A poem such as 'May Queen', with its loving list of the sounds and flavours of Goa is a good example: it would be hard to revise without spoiling the cumulative effect of the detailing of luscious mangoes, a rosary of delights.

The warm rush of water at *Hollant*
And *Copacabana* holding court
To scores of children shrieking with delight
Luscious *mancurada* mangoes
Yield way to the *totapuri,*
Xinanio, tessrio, bhangde reixxaddo
Caldeen, Visvon, chicken *zacuti*
Beef patties, potato cutlets with Mirinda bread
As waves crash over the angry sea
Castles in the sand – *Phool-ne-pakli*
Venha mais vezes, says Mrs Noronha
Gulmohar, Copper pods, the drumstick, the *jamun*
Survey the *kaner,* the emissary of the North
Mum tells her beads for the family rosary
As the *koel* cries on the heels of rain.

('May Queen')

Forty years ago, when there were no flights into Goa's hippie paradise, we always travelled from Bombay by steamer. The train journey was tortuous (I remember at least three changes, the last a metre-gauge line), and the narrow highway was fraught with danger, whether you went by bus or car. The steamer, sadly now defunct, had cabins for a fortunate few, while the decks housed an amazing mixture of people, luggage, and even chickens and goats, all crammed together while preserving invisible boundaries between one group and the next. Travelling on the deck was comparable with travelling second class by train – noisy, hard on the butt, and totally lacking in privacy, but full of a sense of adventure as you watched the land slide past.

Zuari crossing
Sodium lights shimmer on the Styx.
Tourists whistle; '*Iea maray!*'
Hurry up please it is time.
Here time stands still.
Unlike the stormy Krishna, or the restless Jamuna
The lambent Zuari

Receives the prow of the ferry boat
In Cosmic harmony.
Must call home. It's late.
'All-lines-in-this-route-are-busy. Please-call-after-some-time'.

('Last Bus to Vasco, II')

In his avatar of naïve poet Brian Mendonça has travelled by every conceivable form of transport (even the defunct steamer) into and out of Goa—not to mention within Goa—assiduously recording his fellow travellers and the sights and sounds of Goa in a style that at first seems childish and artless. But there is a method in his madness – these seemingly unsophisticated poems mirror the fast-disappearing simplicity and charm of Goa, the old laid-back way of life, fitted to the nature of its folk, and in tune with seasons and climate. He writes:

They came
Armed with axes,
And split its bark with gashes
In a frenzied madness.

The glistening blade
Laying bare
The oozing gum, the ebbing life…
Stroke after stroke
They hack relentlessly
Until,
With a mighty shudder
What was, ceases to be.

'New building coming up', they said…

('Requiem to a Sal')

The Goa of the poet's childhood is fast being replaced by modern hotels and sanitized beaches, unaesthetic high-rises and blocky little bungalows, and he seeks to record today what may be gone tomorrow even as the cancer of modernity destroys it:

Gone are the trees
From the hillside green
As the sons of the fathers
Seek homes of their own.

Hemmed in by buildings
The moving train calls,
I rush to my *balcao*
To listen
Where once as a child
I could see…

Houses of Goa
Thy death-knell is nigh
As the axis shifts
From squat to high…

('Homecoming')

The writer may take on the cloak of historian, recording the past and present of a way of life—an important figure in modern literature, whether he writes in poetry or prose. (In fact a reading of the notes thoughtfully provided at the end of the book is a valuable adjunct to this notation of the past.) Here, memories and the present collide:

…*El Capitan* is no more,
replaced by a shopping mall
as hotel *Taj Mahal* and
hotel *Villena* confer in mid-street.
Eyed by *Tadeus*, fortified by *Bertsey's*
- where I had my first rum with madcap
Zeno…

…*Hanuman Soda* still holds its own
though the nose of the blue Mercedes
is missing.

('Mapusa Memories')

Some 'found' poems, such as the SMS poems, retain the snappy, disconnected effect of the SMS message that I find unattractive. They do not convey the same nostalgia for the past, or the homesickness of the itinerant poet. Rather, they have an edgy, uncertain feel that does not fit with the rest of the work: 'Unanswerable questions persist' even though we are enlightened, here and there, by the poet's notes. Brian is at his best when he presents us with snapshots of his beloved Goa, as thus:

Slippers in the sand
Like mackerels in a heap
Share the laughter
Of children at play.
The setting sun enclaspes them in his warm embrace
As through the grey drizzle
Of fleeting clouds
Close enough to touch,
A rainbow arcs through the twilight.

Along the seashore of tomorrow
One more chance is all it asks for.

('Slippers in the Sand')

While Brian Mendonça's poems may not be to everyone's taste, he does grow upon you. I understand his sense of loss as the modern world overtakes the comfortable past, and I share his dismay as cosy cafes turn into slick bars. I suspect there is another slim volume lurking round the corner. Perhaps the author will shed the inhibitions of the past, and trade some of the freshness of unrevised work for conciseness of expression and better line-breaks. Just a little – I too like those cosy bars, but I am not averse to fresh paint and a little air-conditioning.

An audio CD of the poet reading his poems is included.■

Jane Bhandari is a Mumbai writer and painter and has lived in India for over 36 years.

Polemics of Translation

Mala Pandurang

TRANSLATING INDIA: THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF ENGLISH IN INDIA
By Rita Kothari
Foundation Books, New Delhi, 2006, pp.137, Rs. 195.00

Translating India: The Cultural Politics of English is concerned with the production of the body of writing referred to as Indian Literature in English Translation or ILET. Rita Kothari offers a concise overview of the political and economic ideologies underlying translation activity in English in India, 'what goes into feeding it' and 'the quarters that gives this industry its present prominence and help sustain its energy.' She traces the development of ILET as a body 'that is substantial and distinct', and suggests that 'its unprecedented rise from being a marginalized event to a pervasive trend' over the last two decades is a phenomenon worth close attention (p.2). In order to contextualize her readings, Kothari begins with a trajectory of the politics of translation into English from the 19th century onwards, discusses the cultural politics of English in India in immediate postcolonial India, and then focuses on the emerging phenomenon of a 'new openness' to English translation post 1990s, since when it has been 'striding along energetically with focussed planning and publicity' (p.46). Kothari clarifies in her introduction that her primary intention is to demonstrate how literary and para-literary forces have interacted in multiple ways, In doing so, she throws up a host of new questions on micro issues involved in the production and marketability of English translations.

Translating India is divided into eight segments. Kothari begins with an analysis of historiography of English translation activity in colonial India, and the ideologies underlying such literary acts, offering Tagore's *Gitanjali* as a case study. In the following chapter ('Two-Worlds Theory'), she situates English's 'reconfigured relation' with the Indian languages in the context of postcolonial India 1950s to the post-liberalized India of 1992, taking cognizance of the complicated interface between a growing middle class and the English language. Kothari analyses emerging readership patterns of the urban English-speaking middle class, who inhabit a 'bilingual space of language and world view'. Translation, she points out, is one of the manifestations of this phenomenon.

The next two chapters ('Within Academia'/ Outside the Discipline Machine') are twin chapters dealing with the socio-cultural viability of translation. They examine the usefulness of translation as a pedagogical tool within the academia, and the interconnection between translation activity and parallel developments in related print and visual media fields. The chapter on 'Publisher's Perspective' scrutinizes possible economic reasons why translation titles are increasingly finding a place in the publishing market by commercial publishing houses. Appendix one presents the questionnaire sent out to publishers, while Appendix two (which runs into 24 pages) offers the transcripts of interviews conducted with publishers, wherein they respond to a variety of questions that address the effect of liberalization post-1991 in the publishing industry; the patterns of consumption in the metropolises; mechanisms for testing quality translations; hierarchy in the tripartite scheme of publisher-writer-translator operations etc. Respondents include the Sahitya Akademi, Penguin India, Orient Longman, Katha, Stree, Kali and Navayana. The last two are particularly interesting because of their focus on gender and caste issues.

In 'The Case of Gujarati' Kothari moves from the national scenario to the regional in order to demonstrate how local configurations play an important role in determining the act of translations. She offers an in-depth case study of the state of Gujarat's complicated relationship with the English language. Kothari describes how the state's language policy which undermined the English language created an attitude of hostile indifference up to the mid 70s. She then attempts to explain the shift from this hostility to a desire for visibility viz. translations in English in the light of the post-80s transformation of the economy. Gujarat is a state embroiled in an increasingly fundamentalist outlook post-February 2002, and Kothari raises pertinent concerns over its implication for literary activities.

Kothari uses her discussion of the multiple ideological implications of English to offer some telling observation on the emerging Indian middleclass. As Kothari rightly points out, there is a 'need to consider translation activity under the rubric of "asymmetrical power relations"' (p.94), and ILET into English should therefore be viewed in the context of the market: "It may be useful to see English through translation as a space or a form made inescapable through dominance as well as democracy" (p.95). Given the research orientation of Kothari's project, the book is academic in style and content. Kothari in fact sums up her work by suggesting 'a host of issues that can serve as topics for research scholars' (p.93). Yet on the other hand, Kothari is able to convey her readings in a lucid and well-structured manner, thus making her matter accessible to the lay reader who is keen on understanding the polemics of translation activity in English, in India.■

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Crisscrossing Desires

Nilofer Kaul

OR THE DAY SEIZES YOU
By Rajorshi Chakraborti
Penguin, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 212, Rs. 250.00

The book is in a sense reflective of a larger anxiety that cuts through all Indian writing in English: the crisscrossing needs to be recognized outside their own turf, the need to justify and explain their culture, and simultaneously the need to distance themselves from all that is ugly and deplorable.

Through literature, if not through life, one has learned that the most banal of events often lead you to profoundly disturbing discoveries. Thus it is that Rajorshi Chakraborti's debut novel begins. The protagonist is called away from work by his daughter's school. The six year old has raised a storm by lifting her skirt and inviting two boys to stand against her. The father tries to gently find out what led to this. Finally the truth is revealed and he discovers his daughter has accidentally witnessed his wife's liaison. Hurt and angry, he runs away with the daughter and gets his father, who is a sort of goon one associates with political henchmen in Bengal, to have his wife evicted.

This is where the book really scores. Niladri Dasgupta looks long and hard at himself. And what he sees is not flattering. He has shown little conscience and some criminal record. He has raked in money in fraudulent ventures that have collapsed, and he has bought land and houses for himself, leaving other investors in a mess.

When his marriage breaks down, his wife calmly shows him what he has never seen as his weakness : his cowardice, his desire to run away from all unpleasantness and his selfishness. The self knowledge redeems him, as he also acquits the dignified, clearheaded wife.

We next see him in London. He does not set out to give a feel of the place, but remains in a slightly claustrophobic world constituted by one Gujarati and one Pole. Unfortunately his whole recounting of his unlikely friendships with these two as well as his affair with a Japanese woman remain pervaded by stereotypes. The world is no longer the rough grey world in India, but a locker room universe of male sexual exploits, banter and masturbation. We don't ever know what he does here, except that he boards with a Gujarati skinflint. This part of the novel could have been written anywhere – as it is more about being lonely, an outsider, and not specifically with being an outsider in England.

The most memorable part here is his encounter with his cousin Debu, the son of his father's brother, with whom there had been a long family feud. Debu is the brooding genius. Above it all, an aspiring novelist, the narrator's hero. He could have dwindled into a cliché, except when he talks about his broken relationship, he brings in a powerful lyricism, a mood that the narrator does not manage in his own break up.

> You know, in all these years, Ava has become my word for absence. When anyone's absent, I miss Ava. It's like the original sin,…that doesn't let you grieve newly for anything else… It's the mind's way of marking time, of filling it. It's not really missing, just habit. I'll tell you what: I've grown to think of it as the screensaver of my soul … (p.67)

Niladri is intimidated by Debu and finds himself identifying with the woman Debu alternately scorned and loved—Ava. He thinks of himself as dull, slow, pedestrian—the terms debu uses to describe Ava. Self disparagement coexists with self assertion. He is critical of his father's role and blames him for his own unscrupulous and cowardly conduct.

But after his showdown with his father, he decides to accompany him, in a bid to escape being killed by an old enemy. The motley group goes to Mumbai for safety. The father – so far harshly portrayed—has by now redeemed himself through a confession once again of his history of a deprived childhood. He has also reconciled with the brother's widow. But they are all on the run from their past.

A Hindi film plot erupts suddenly where melodrama now sits uneasily with intense self analysis. This part is the least convincing. Perhaps two discourses are being explored; the sentimental one of family and reconciliation and the alienating one of ruthless introspection. The latter prevails. In a burst of angst, Niladri leaves his remaining family, somewhat reluctantly. The reconciliation so far promised, never does take place and as he leaves, the personal seeks to become a metaphor for the historical. The Mumbai he leaves sans family is the Mumbai of communal riots and gratuitous violence. It could have been powerful, except that it evokes déjà vu. The yoking together of the personal and historical seems a little too easy. He leaves amidst a storm of platitudes. Suddenly Debu who has so far symbolized brilliant imagination is mouthing clichés :

> But you know what is really tragic, that our ignorance is not innocent. ..The middle class cheers on this government because its agenda is different; it doesn't matter if nothing has changed for the other half-billion. This attention means we are now super power; we are getting our rightful due… (p.188)

Oddly the narrator is silenced by him once again and feels his inadequacy in the face of the other's brilliance. However, he turns around at the end, equating Debu with his ex-wife Meena, as overarticulate, effete intellectuals. It is at best a disappointing prognosis. Two possibilities flash momentarily but are quashed by an unexpected note of self righteousness. Ultimately in this assertion of their wrongness, there seems to be an overwhelming need to justify the narrator, a character that had so far refrained from the very righteousness that pervades much confessional writing.

The ending notwithstanding, it is quite readable. The emotions are strong, if a bit raw and there is a remarkable capacity to refrain from easy sentimentalizing, even though the narrative does occasionally lose control. The prose is mostly effortless. If there is anything generic that disturbs the flow, it is the attempt to target audiences in two places. There is a liberal sprinkling of Bengali that is sporadically translated. But more awkward still is the interspersing of explanatory prose.

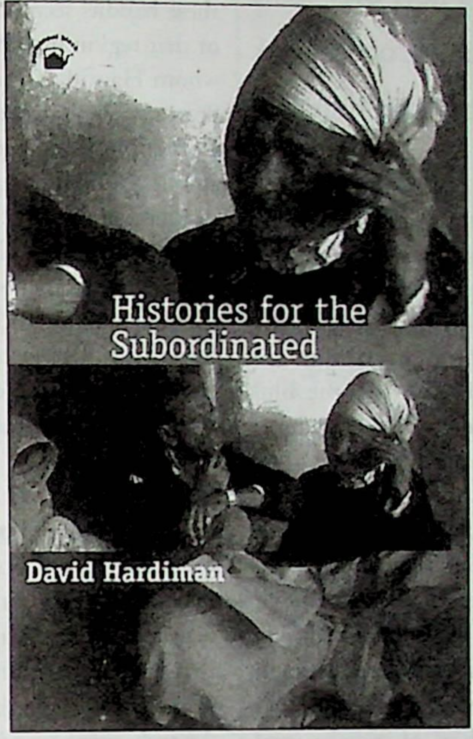
> The truth is, in India generally but in Calcutta in particular, whenever an abnormal traffic situation, a slowness or a hold up, threatens to develop, it's immediately and universally understood to be a licence for anarchy and what follows is…(p.25)

Passages like these force upfront questions of target audience, cultural alienation and hybridization. The book is in a sense reflective of a larger anxiety that cuts through all Indian writing in English: the crisscrossing needs to be recognized outside their own turf, the need to justify and explain their culture, and simultaneously the need to distance themselves from all that is ugly and deplorable. As such this explains the narrator's need to exhibit both self loathing and self righteousness.■

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A Conspectus of Research Across Three Decades

Sumit Sarkar



HISTORIES FOR THE SUBORDINATED
By David Hardiman
Permanent Black, Delhi, 2006,
pp 392, Rs. 695.00

Histories for the Subordinated consists of nine essays, all of them reprints, but many of them not easily available, with an Introduction that is new and theoretically significant. Together, they will convey a deeper understanding of Hardiman's work to his readers, both old and new. This is spread now over some three decades, and is marked throughout by a richness of fieldwork and oral material unequalled by any other South Asian historian. With this Hardiman has always combined meticulous and critically nuanced archival research, and oral and written data together have illuminated a whole series of obscure or unknown episodes and processes of the history of subordinated groups in modern Gujarat and western India. The collection is of great value in once more making readily accessible research papers lying scattered in old volumes and journals.[1] But it will do more. Revealing the progress of Hardiman as a historian, it should help to correct an impression about the scholar that I think is fairly widespread, though seldom expressed in public. Hardiman, it is sometimes assumed, is no doubt a fine empirical scholar, but maybe he lacks somewhat the theoretical depth and ability to move with the times manifested by several of his colleagues in Subaltern Studies. He has instead stuck to the old groove of early Subaltern Studies, with a 'history from below' approach when this has long ceased to attract much attention amidst the vogue for postcoloniality and cultural studies. (An adherence which incidentally has not been helpful for Hardiman in the academic job market: to the best of my knowledge he still lacks a tenurial position). The volume should go far to remove this impression of theoretical naivete. The Introduction makes clear that Hardiman's present views are connected to, but still significantly different from, his earlier positions. And certainly there has been a considerable advance in theoretical sophistication.

We need however to first take a brief look at the nine essays. They fall into three broad groups. Four of them are about specific popular movements (Chapters 1-4). These are followed by two dealing with key points of tension in rural society—liquor policies and usury, studied over the long-term. The last three analyse questions of environment and related protests, again over the long term.

Chapter 4 is about the Quit India movement in Gujarat. This was an indisputably 'mainstream', Congress-led, movement. One, further, which did not see the kind of radicalization through subaltern autonomous pressures that had been the main theme of early Subaltern Studies. Exceptionally for Hardiman, this is one essay based mainly on archival and other written material (contemporary pamphlets, newspapers, subsequent reminiscences), not oral sources. It reveals the author's strengths in handling conventional sources, too. The paper highlights some of the paradoxes of '42 in this area, in particular the contrast between the old Gandhian base of Kheda, which this time was relatively quiet after an initial outburst, and a different but long-continued movement in Broach, Surat and Navsari districts. Here, though, the movement was marked not by a mass upheaval, but conspiratorial, terroristic violence. The activists were mainly middle-class young men, though with considerable, but tacit popular support—in sharp contrast to the standard image of Gujarat being the classic land of Gandhian nonviolent peasant movements. Bombay Presidency in fact reported 76% of the total number of bomb explosions in India as a whole. Ahmedabad, too, was exceptional, in its long strike of mill-workers under Gandhian leadership. Hardiman seeks to explain the specifics of '42 in Gujarat by drawing attention to a correlation with differential class-cum-caste relationships. In Kheda, the Patidar superior peasant strata, everywhere the firmest base of Gandhian nationalism in Gujarat, now faced acute conflicts with the rural groups subordinated to them, some of whom had meanwhile developed a Kshatriya status movement of their own. In the southern districts there was still much greater rural unity, for the subordinate strata saw their principal oppressors not in Patidars, but in Parsi liquor-dealers and landlords, who in addition tended to be supporters of the British. The other basic point to which Hardiman draws our attention is the absence now of any no-tax movement. Again, the Ahmedabad strike was not about class demands, but with nationalist motivations, and for once the mill-owners did not seem worried, at least till the movement as a whole was declining. The potential for social, as distinct from anti-British, radicalism of '42 was thus actually lower than in the earlier peak-points of mass nationalism—something which I feel was more or less true for other regions, too. (I remember making this point in my *Modern India* many years back, but unlike Hardiman, not on the basis of personal primary research). There was a kind of all-in anti-British class unity this time in the regions that did become active—which helps us to understand the Ahmedabad strike. Probably the key reason was the widespread impression that British rule was collapsing, and Britain was losing the War. This had the corollary of toning down elements of autonomous popular actions with socially-radical implications, so characteristic above all of the 1919-1922 upsurge. The talk of an 'August Revolution', in other words, is perhaps a little exaggerated, unless violent methods and anti-British militancy are equated with 'revolution'.

The first essay in the volume in contrast is about an autonomous movement of Bhils under Motilal Tejawat in the winter of 1921-22, which culminated in a 'forgotten massacre' on 7 March 1922 when the armed forces of Mewar fired on a crowd of some two thousand Bhils and killed at least 22 of them. Popular memory, resurrected by some Congress politicians in the late 1990s to gain popularity among the adivasis, spoke of a much higher number of deaths, perhaps as many as 1200, considerably higher than in Jallianwala Bagh. The movement had been against the exactions of Rajput landlords and rulers of Mewar and a number of neighbouring princely state. Motilal was a shopkeeper who turned activist after experiencing first-hand the oppressive ways of a *thakur*. He developed a deep sympathy for the exploited tribals, and became the leader of what developed into a massive movement. Imagining himself to be a loyal follower

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of Gandhi, Tejawat combined agrarian demands with moral reform. He urged Bhils to give up liquor, abstain from violence against human beings and animals alike, and go in for more hygienic and pure habits. 'Gandhi raj', he promised, would involve a drastic reduction in payments to the state. Yet Gandhi when he heard about the movement promptly denounced Motilal in an article in *Young India* (2 February 1922), for the Bhil crowds that were moving about that region occasionally carried whatever primitive weapons they had, which was their standard practice. The Mahatma advised them to petition the princely authorities, "and never resort to arms". A month later, the Mewar Bhil Corps opened fire with little or no provocation, leading to a massacre almost exactly contemporaneous with the Chauri Chauri incident which has been remembered so much more. Hardiman finds through research that the total number of the killed was probably considerably more than the 22 officially mentioned, though certainly much less than the rumours of 1200. Exceptionally, since the lapse in time in this case was 75 years, his favourite method of massive oral interviews was not possible here. He turned instead to a meticulous study of available written material: one big file in the National Archives about Tejawat, and contemporary writings and correspondence. The essay is striking in its ability to draw out nuances and slight shifts in attitudes, as for instance a slight change in Gandhi's attitude revealed in a later comment on 26 February, which he correlates carefully with the diverse reports which the Mahatma was getting from his emissaries in that area. Official attitudes, too, were not invariably identical. Where the essay is a little less satisfactory, however, is in bringing out the background and contours of the movement, no doubt because so little has survived in the way of historical material in this case.

In significant contrast, Hardiman's essay on another entirely forgotten episode, the Devi movement in South Gujarat around 1921-22, was reconstructed almost entirely through interviews collected while wandering through the region (Chapter 2 was first published in 1984, and later developed into a book). The commands of the Devi involved calls to adivasis and other smallholding peasants to give up liquor and meat, purify themselves, boycott Parsi liquor-dealers and landlords, and, towards the end, take vows in Gandhi's name and start wearing *khadi*. The field-work involved was clearly prodigious: the book eventually listed 230 interviews. The movement, predictably for that period of *Subaltern Studies*, was seen primarily in class terms: the oppressive actions of Parsi liquor dealers, who benefited greatly from the ban imposed in 1878 on local toddy manufacture. There is some account, though, of the work of an educated adivasi social reformer advocating abstinence a few years before the outbreak of the Devi phenomenon. But one problem perhaps is that the oral data, collected some sixty years later, is taken perhaps a little at face value in tracing the routes of the spread of the cult. The interrelationships of Devi with existing patterns of adivasi religion also remain unexplored. The references to anti-Muslim and anti-Christian messages of the Devi are not probed any further. Instead, both in this essay and in the subsequent book, there is a long discussion of alternative sociological models, which one 'fits' the movement better: not perhaps the most helpful form of analysis.

The much later essay dealing with Raghu Bhangare, a 'social bandit' in the Sahyadri hills of western Maharashtra in the mid-nineteenth century, is much subtler, in methods and findings alike, and indicates the progress of Hardiman as a historian. I consider this paper the best in the volume. Raghu dates back to mid-nineteenth century Maharashtra, and yet oral tradition is very significant in the research underlying this paper. Hardiman found in the archives numerous references to attacks on Marwari moneylenders by robber bands of Mahadev Kolis evidently enjoying popular sympathy. They burnt account books and debt bonds, looted the houses of the Baniyas and sometimes cut off their noses. Yet none of these bandits seem to have survived in popular memory today. The people of that region in contrast were full of stories of a Raghu Bhangare, about whom Hardiman found some archival mention only later, when having drawn a blank in the Maharashtra Archives he turned to the India Office Collection. But songs about the heroic deeds of Raghu could still be heard among the Kolis, emphasizing his valour, how he had led a *band* (revolt, in Marathi) against the oppressors of the poor, how his brave mother had helped him. Hardiman's essay is a truly impressive bringing-together of elements drawn from close reading of oral material (in particular, a song he had heard from a village woman, and some stories still current in that region) with some archival data. The latter enabled the historian to fix some dates for Raghu's raids, roughly from 1844 till his capture in 1848—but it is the skilful analysis of oral material that makes the essay remarkable. Quality-wise, I think it to be a major advance over the one on the Devi movement, even though the latter was based on a far greater quantum of oral sources . Through meticulous analysis, Hardiman locates Raghu as a point of transition in the evolution of the *band*. In pre-colonial and early British times, these had been directed against state or local authorities extracting revenue, and the petty chiefs or adventurers leading them were often ready to enter into compromise with their overlords on the basis of sharing the loot from the actual producers. The new kinds of *bands* emphasized much more the internal class tensions in rural society, particularly outsider moneylender exploitation. (The well-known Deccan disturbances of 1875, also turning around *mahajan* exploitation, is not mentioned in this paper, but then that was located in another part of Maharashtra). In parenthesis, I would like to add that such a transition was perhaps a general characteristic of the post-1850s era of South Asian rural history, when particularly after 1857, rebellions against the state (Mughal, their successors, the Company) turning around questions of revenue extraction, and often led by local *zamindars*, gave place to anti-landlord or anti-moneylender protests.

Returning to Raghu, Hardiman has been able to explore through songs and legends the question as to why he alone among the many social bandits of that time, has survived in popular memory, what specific features of his actions and personality make him still so attractive. In this context Hardiman enters upon an important discussion of where precisely oral evidence is valuable, and where in contrast it is bound to be very problematic (p.102). He points out that popular memory is often unreliable where the question is of precise details and dates of what had happened. They do not provide much in the way of 'accurate', 'positivistic' history: here official records are much more valuable. (It may be noted that in his early work, like his first book about peasant nationalists of Kheda, and even more the study of the Devi movement where oral testimony could not be cross-checked with much in the way of archival data, Hardiman had basically used his oral evidence in a more-or-less 'positivistic' manner to construct a factual narrative). The Raghu Bhangare case however is invaluable in the indications it gives of where popular memory is most valuable. It provides some indications about the kind of values underlying such movements. Hardiman thinks these to have been notions of family honour, associated with patriarchal-feudal assumptions. In a society divided into rival clans and families competing among themselves for greater prestige, honour was inextricably bound up with 'proper' behaviour of 'their' women. Here Hardiman finds the village song foregrounding Raghu's mother, the "brave Ramayi", very helpful. Archival sources indicate that Raghu had been embittered about the police because she had been tortured by them, and he had amply exacted vengeance for that insult. The mother, in her turn, is

hailed as heroic in the song for smuggling into Raghu's prison a knife hidden in a *roti*. The paramount value of defending the honour of women in the family or clan, however, has often involved—right up to contemporary times—avenging insults by brutal, assaults and rape of women belonging to the rival group. And women within the family held to have transgressed community norms would be treated with equal brutality. Women never became active members of the *bands*, but were often the worst victims of the state or landlord-moneylender terror which invariably followed every incident of protest by bandits like Raghu. Hardiman's sensitive account of such gender dimensions represents a point of departure from the bulk of his other work, as well as that of his colleagues. Subaltern Studies, particularly in its earlier days, had not shown much awareness of such issues. But Raghu seems to have distinguished himself from other *band* leaders not only by his being the leader of the biggest *band* of all, but by following somewhat higher standards of chivalry and generosity. He also acquired an exceptional reputation for religious devotion. Raghu was eventually captured while going disguised as a holy man on a pilgrimage to Pandarpur. Such factors, Hardiman suggests, might help to explain why Raghu proved so much more memorable than other similar figures who have periodically appeared in the Sahyadri mountains down to the 1960s, for anti-moneylender *bands* remained an endemic feature among the Mahadev Kolis down to the 1960s.

Usury and liquor policies were prominent in several of Hardiman's case-studies of specific protest movements, and Chapters 5 and 6 follow up these themes through essays dealing with them over the long-term. They extend over the colonial era, and sometimes enter earlier times. Chapter 6, on usury, dearth and famine, was a curtain-riser to Hardiman's book-length work, *Feeding the Baniya* (1996). It begins with the familiar dearth-debt vicious circle, and points out, following up a hint by Kosambi many years back, that usury has played a rather special part in Indian rural societies across the centuries. Usury was a major form of extraction of surplus, in the absence of widespread slavery or serfdom, and unlike medieval Christian or Islamic theory, interest-based money-lending was quite respectable—as indicated by the term 'mahajan', great or noble man. The familiar story follows of the many ways in which the problem worsened in colonial times, through new systems of land rights, law courts, and long-dominant assumptions of the superiority of the 'free' market. More original is the exploration, on the basis of western Indian data, of the ways in which the highly personalized nature of *sahukar*-peasant relations in India produced notions of reciprocity—which could be appropriated at times by peasants to pressurize the *banias*. Here Hardiman is clearly following in the tracks of E.P. Thompson's classic studies of eighteenth-century England, but highlighting also the specificities. The complex blend of respect, fear, and hatred, for instance, at times led peasants to view the moneylenders as being sorcerers, having magical powers to bring on scarcities and stop rain. Hardiman concludes with some interesting evidence from Sirohi, a princely state in south Rajasthan, where a leading part in peasant protests was played by Anup Das, who had imbibed socialistic ideas while serving in the army during the 1914-18 War. But even this modernistic movement was shot through with notions of the magical powers of the moneylenders. As late as 1963, in Sirohi, and 1985, in Sabarkanthi (Gujarat), the hatred of usurers seen to be violating traditional norms of mutuality led to attacks on Jain temples—centers of the religion of the *banias*.

I found the essay on what might be called the political economy of drink more striking, since this is a surprisingly neglected theme. Yet excise in the late colonial era was second only to land revenue in the revenues of the state. Excessive land taxes clearly hit 'honest' agriculturists, while a growing Indian middle-class opinion felt that taxes on drink would check pernicious habits and improvidence. But Hardiman emphasizes that drink was often an essential ingredient of the community life of the rural poor. Considered indispensable in social and popular religious functions, it was an expression of solidarity, and provided some relief to poor and landless people when other forms of sustenance dried up during the lean season.

In South Gujarat till the 1870s, *toddy*, from coconut or other palm trees, and *daru*, from *mahua*, could be easily prepared in village homes.

The paramount value of defending the honour of women in the family or clan, however, has often involved—right up to contemporary times—avenging insults by brutal, assaults and rape of women belonging to the rival group. And women within the family held to have transgressed community norms would be treated with equal brutality. Women never became active members of the *bands*, but were often the worst victims of the state or landlord-moneylender terror which invariably followed every incident of protest by bandits like Raghu. Hardiman's sensitive account of such gender dimensions represents a point of departure from the bulk of his other work....

But there were already Parsi liquor-dealers trying to corner the production and sale of liquor. The big change, however, came in 1878 with the Abkari Act, which sought to enhance revenue by centralizing liquor production in central distilleries, with excise now collected at their exit-points. Parsi dealers and shopkeepers now flourished as never before, since distillation and sale rights were often farmed out to them, while peasant home production of liquor was sought to be stamped out. The new policy was extremely unpopular, numerous petitions were made pleading for a reversal of the Act, and even some subordinate British officials were critical of Pritchard, the man primarily responsible for strictly enforcing the new policy in Gujarat. But the policy could not be reversed, for settled peasants lacked the traditions of militancy of adivasi communities of Bhils and Kolis. Excise revenues mounted steadily, and by the 1930s sometimes was even surpassing the land tax proceeds from South Gujarat. Peasants could, and did, take recourse to illegal home production. But tapping toddy from palm trees could not be kept secret, while even preparing *daru* from *mahua* gave off a strong smell. Parsi liquor dealers generally lived in the villages, and so secret distillation was not much of a viable option. There was a fair amount of smuggling from Portuguese colonies and princely states, but the alternative which gathered strength over time was abstinence, which would immediately weaken the stranglehold of the Parsi liquor dealers as well as hurt the government. From around 1895, a series of popular temperance movements emerged in this area, followed by the Devi cult, while there was also of course the major impact of Gandhian ideology from the 1920s. Hardiman emphasizes, however, the somewhat surprising continued popularity of illicit drinking right down to contemporary times, despite complete legal prohibition in Gujarat from 1950. A fine and original essay—but with one limitation: possible gender differences in attitudes regarding drink are not explored at all. In Andhra and several other regions, autonomous and powerful women's movements have developed in recent times attacking excessive male drinking for wrecking homes and livelihoods of the poor. It would have been interesting to know whether any such dimension has been noticeable in Gujarat.

The last three essays in the collection deal with themes of environmental history, and highlight tensions and protest movements around water and forest rights. Hardiman has deep sympathy for the very large numbers of adivasis and peasants hit by colonial and postcolonial state policies and the advance of capitalism. But he is able at the same time to avoid tendencies, fairly common among 'Green' movements, towards romanticizing the pre-modern. In Chapter 7, Hardiman tells us about how he had encountered numerous relicts of small dams in his wanderings in the Baglan region of the Sahyadri hills. He found some evidence of their construction and maintenance by combinations of aid from local rulers, and community efforts by villagers. Management of pre-colonial irrigation evidently varied

across regions. Other scholars, for instance, have traced similar small irrigation works in South Bihar to small zamindar initiatives. Baglan attained through such small dams a considerable reputation for prosperity. But the small dam system began to decline in the time of troubles that accompanied the long transition from Maratha to stable British rule. Baglan came to be considered a backward region, with settled agriculture giving way to slash-and burn, and today it is a 'tribal' area. The British, after first neglecting irrigation, went in for bureaucratically-managed big dams, but not in Baglan. Their successors pushed ahead with a similar policy, of course on a vastly enhanced scale. The dire consequences, often, of big dams, for the livelihood of peoples and for environments alike, are becoming increasingly evident today. These have at last won some public recognition, largely through the Narmada Bachao Andolan, but state policies continue unchanged.

The history of well irrigation in Gujarat has been somewhat different. The proportion of that in Gujarat increased from late-colonial times onwards, but the result often has been a drying-up of sub-soil water through excessive construction and use of tubewells. Hardiman does not fully accept here the views of enviromentalists like Anil Agarwal, who have formulated a sharp dichotomy between precolonial construction by village communities free of internal tensions, and the growth of commercialization in colonial and postcolonial times disrupting such near-idyllic conditions. He points out that pre-colonial villages were hardly egalitarian, and some merchant capital penetration was not absent: but of course these were vastly aggravated by colonial policies. Differentiation stimulated the growth of rich peasants who went ahead with well construction, on a scale that has proved unsustainable in Gujarat .

The last chapter probes the question of forest rights, in the Dangs region—the home of Bhil, Varli, and Gamit adivasis as well as Konkani Kunbi settled peasants. Bhil chiefs, hunters and shifting cultivators, had ruled the region in pre-colonial times. British rule came to mean domination by forest officials, with the adivasis increasingly perceived as enemies of forest exploitation of timber (extracted for ship-building and then railway sleepers), as well as conservation. There were repeated Bhil protests and risings, outlined by Hardiman, and some Gandhian initatives to improve conditions through cooperatives and social reforms from the late-1940s (in part to ounter a powerful Communist-led movement among the Varlis in nearby hane district). But adivasi unrest remains endemic, and Hardiman begins his essay with the efforts of some adivasis to cultivate some areas in reserved forests in the Dangs in the early 1990s, which they claimed had been the sites of old villages.

Taken as a whole, the volume provides a fine conspectus of Hardiman's research across three decades. One omission I find somewhat unfortunate, though. The Dangs region in recent years has been an area of sharp conflicts between Hindutva forces, and Christian communities and their missions. Hardiman has been working on this very contemporary and live issue, and has recently published a brief but illuminating paper, entitled 'Christianity and the Adivasis of Gujarat', in a volume honouring Jan Breman.[2] Here he traces some of the origins of the current conflicts, and also probes the question why the sudden rise in the number of Christian converts in the Dangs from the 1980s has been due not to the work of the old missions in that region, but to new entrants, notably the Pentecostals. The emphasis on faith-healing, in place of going to expensive doctors, seems to have proved particularly attractive. The rise in Christian numbers provoked the recent VHP efforts at reconversion, quite often through terror and violence. The charges made against missions are somewhat contradictory: depicted always as agents of western imperialism, they are at the same time condemned for not being western enough, in so far as they are discouraging modern medicine. Hardiman here points to certain parallels between Pentecostal ideas, and those preached among adivasis earlier by Vaishnavite and Shaivite Bhagat movements that had at one time blocked Christian conversion. The essay thus deals with an issue very relevant today: but no doubt considerations of publication space precluded its inclusion.

I have left till the end discussion of the important Introduction, the one entirely new piece. It starts with a helpful account of the essays included in the volume, along with something of the academic and political contexts in which they had been written. Hardiman then embarks upon a brief but very important theoretical discussion, elucidating his current methodological approaches (pp.18-25). He has been, and remains, a loyal member of the Subaltern Studies editorial collective. The differences that have nevertheless emerged are conveyed in an entirely non-polemical and cautious manner, through implication and nuances rather than direct statements. There are also occasional formulations in the essays that still point towards some of the more problematic features of that enterprise. On page 100, in the Raghu Bhangare piece, for instance, there is the assertion that oral sources can "allow the historian to engage with the subaltern classes' own understanding of their histories". This presupposes both an undifferentiated 'community' or subaltern consciousness, as well as a claim that the Subaltern historian can fully represent that consciousness. I find the title of the book also rather troubling on this account. 'Histories *for* the subaltern' (my italics) assumes, with a certain naivete, that the vast majority of the subjects of Hardiman's research can have access to his work . These are precisely the kinds of problems that Gayatri Spivak had detected in the project, many years ago, in her 'Can the Subaltern Speak?'

However the departures the Introduction and some of the essays indicate are much more important. There is for instance a reminder that Enlightenment values, often rejected in a blanket manner in some late Subaltern and much feminist writing, did have "the potential to liberate the subaltern to an important degree" (p.22)—by stimulating thinking about human rights, notably. More central to Hardiman's present position are the doubts he has clearly developed about absolute polarities or disjunctions between neat, homogenized elites and subalterns. This is evident particularly in the more recent essays, like the one about Raghu (that one statement apart), or on small dams and wells. Such binary oppositions have been very common in South Asian history-writing in general. They remain evident, for instance, in the changing structures of Partha Chatterji's successive formulations: elite / subaltern, derivative discourse of the colonized middle class / indigenous community consciousness, and then, most recently, civil / political society. A second major change in Hardiman is a move from his earlier total rejection of poststructuralist approaches towards a more nuanced understanding. He remains—rightly—very critical of the reification of linguistic analysis in much poststructuralist work, but now finds some elements particularly in Derrida helpful. From the critique of Levi-Strauss onwards, Derrida has been arguing against the essentializations inherent in the positing of binary opposites, and the need rather to foreground the play of *differance* within structures.

I have a special reason to welcome these changes in Hardiman. They happen to coincide repeatedly with the kind of positions towards which I have been moving in recent years, though so far only in thinking and one or two seminar presentations. We have had no chance to discuss these questions with each other, but it is nice to find that our thoughts are going on somewhat parallel lines.■

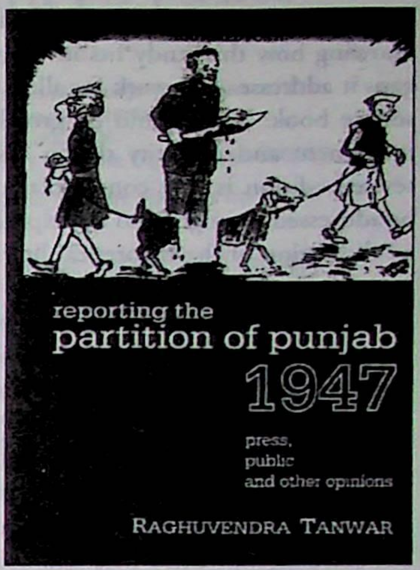
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1 Unfortunately, though , the volume does not keep up to the promise Hardiman makes on p.25, about a full list at the end of the volume of all the writings of the author , which would have conveyed to interested readers information about original dates and places of publication. This is a serious and unexplained omission.

2 Ghanshyam Shah , Mario Rutten , and Hein Streefkerk, ed., *Development and Deprivation in Gujarat* (Sage, New York etc, 2002) .

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Dissonance Between Officialese And Ground Realities



Ian Talbot

REPORTING THE PARTITION OF PUNJAB 1947: PRESS, PUBLIC AND OTHER OPINIONS
By Raghuvendra Tanwar
Manohar, New Delhi, 2006, pp. viii+622, Rs. 1195.00

Raghuvendra Tanwar's weighty volume provides a wealth of material on developments in the Punjab during the period 1947-8. Despite its title, the work only in passing reflects on the different 'spins', news outlets imparted to the events of Partition. It rather uses newspapers and other documentary sources to piece together a detailed narrative. This begins with the breakdown in communal peace following the resignation on 2 March 1947 of the Khizr Tiwana Coalition Government and concludes with the impact on the Punjab of Mahatma Gandhi's assassination. While the coverage is stronger with respect to East Punjab, there is considerable material also on West Punjab, especially on developments in Lahore. The volume does not only attempt balance with respect to coverage, but also in terms of its assessments. Professor Tanwar judiciously avoids one sided blame apportionment when covering such sensitive issues as communal violence and the abduction of women. Indeed what emerges from the study are the common experiences affecting all religious communities with respect to patterns of violence, migration, resettlement and rehabilitation.

Tanwar is concerned throughout not so much with the two geographical Punjabs of East and West, but the two worlds of Punjab made up of different social classes who were to experience partition in vastly different ways. 'While one was able', he declares, 'to foresee the clouds of doom and act swiftly, grabbing prime opportunities on both sides, the other ignorant, superstition-ridden and fatalistic did little more than allow themselves to be pushed around, pawns, by all accounts' (p. 96). While the author allows that exposure to violence had some levelling characteristics, (p. 473) he is clear that the privileged classes were best able to recoup their material losses and even profit from the social dislocation of Partition. Chapter Seven, 'Peace Returns to Punjab' is tellingly subtitled, 'A Study of Corruption and Greed.' It skilfully utilizes, newspaper editorials, reports and letters of complaint to lay bare the web of graft and corruption that ran from village *patwaris* to cabinet ministers concerning the allotment of evacuee property. This sorry state of affairs existed both sides of the Wagah border. 'Attractive statements supported by huge statistics indicating the dimensions of the resettlement effort were routinely issued, sadly these statements concealed a whole body of corrupt decisions of injustice and unfairness' (p. 473). The unsparing textual narrative is accompanied by carefully selected contemporary cartoons drawn primarily from *Shankar's Weekly*. They reinforce the refugees' sense of injustice and disillusionment with the administrative and political classes.

The gulf between official pronouncements and ground realities is another feature of the chapter. This theme is linked back to the earlier part of the book. Here the author juxtaposes calls from politicians for minorities to stay in their ancestral homes with the deteriorating local law and order situation. Those who heeded such advice often paid with their lives. At the same time, the politically acute and well connected were shifting family members to safety and were moving investments and business headquarters well before the Boundary Award was made public, in further evidence of the two worlds of Punjab.

The volume understands the Punjab's descent into violence primarily in terms of the administrative chaos (p.292) allowing cycles of retribution to take place. The starting point is taken as the March 1947 Rawalpindi Massacres (p.133). These not only created a Sikh desire for revenge, but were the beginnings of the administrative decline in the Punjab which was accelerated by the hasty British withdrawal from the subcontinent. The Rawalpindi Massacres also ensured that the Punjab itself would have to be partitioned along with the creation of Pakistan. Surprisingly the author does not reflect on whether the Massacres created an awareness in the Sikh community that it could not live in a future Muslim dominated Punjab, or whether it merely reinforced this outlook. This could be said to have been based more widely in the use of a selective use of history of Mughal persecution and martyrdom to forge a neo-Sikh identity from the time of the late nineteenth century Singh Sabha movement onwards. This was propagated not only in tracts and pamphlets, but in the acclaimed novels of Bhai Vir Singh.

The author rightly points out that the Punjab Governor Sir Evan Jenkins sent a number of warnings of impending civil war in Punjab to New Delhi. He does not however fully reflect on the different aims and outlooks of the British administration in Lahore, New Delhi and London at this critical juncture. These may help explain why Jenkins' missives were ignored and why there was a case for Mountbatten's moving the date of independence forward to 15 August, rather than it being seen 'as an error of judgement' (p.201). The point is well made that the Boundary Commission sittings generated tension (pp.277, 303) and the delay in the Award's publication was a contributory factor in the violence which accompanied Partition. Much of the violence in Lahore and Amritsar in the weeks leading up to independence was of course occasioned by attempts on the ground to pre-empt the Commission's findings. It occurred to a background of the polarization of the services which explains the increasing unreliability of the police to maintain order. Bad-discipline was also encouraged by the failure to punish those responsible for the earlier Rawalpindi Massacres. The author alludes to this, but could perhaps make more of it.

Much of the emerging 'new history' of Partition is in tune with this volume's findings. There are similarities, for example, with respect to the differential class as well as gender experience of Partition and its aftermath. Personal testimonies also reveal the understanding referred to on p. 377 that migration was both unexpected and not seen as permanent. The 'new history' has similarly pointed to the dissonance between official pronouncements on refugee rehabilitation and individuals' experience of the corruption and chaos that surrounded allotments. The extent to which violence had elements of organization as well as spontaneity is also a theme of a number of recent and shortly to be published studies. They pick up on the role of the police in organized killings. Raghuvendra Tanwar adds to this understanding, useful material on the fact that the breakdown of communications encouraged the insubordination of officials and policemen (p. 448).

The volume surprisingly makes no bibliographical reference to the work of Urvashi Butalia, Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin. Similarly there is no evidence in either the text or bibiliography of engagement with Gyanendra Pandey's recent work, *Remembering Partition*. Yet there are a number of occasions in the text where it would have been appropriate to have introduced discussion of how community and official historical discourses utilized the events of Partition for identity and nation-building purposes.

The emerging historiography of the events of Partition and its aftermath is absent from the study. This is surprising given that there is reflection in the opening chapter on some of the major works dealing with the causes of Muslim separatism. A critical reader could argue that in the absence of knowing how this study fits in the wider literature on Partition and what gaps it addresses, the work for all its wealth of material is primarily a useful source book. This would be grossly unfair, given the level of historical judgement and maturity that is displayed throughout. Nevertheless, if a revised edition is ever contemplated, then historiographical issues should be addressed. It might also be helpful to introduce a comparative dimension by discussion of the theoretical literature on ethnic conflict and genocide.

In sum, this is a meticulously researched work. It brings much new material to the subject. Good use is made of previously underutilized private papers such as those of the British DC of Gurgaon, P. Brenden at the time of the disturbances in Mewat. Some of the new material may shock the general reader, much of it is of interest to the specialist. Useful insights are provided, for example into the economic crisis in the aftermath of Partition and the operation of the Black Market. The reader is even introduced to the Mamdot *kebab* (p.522). The fact that refugees from East Punjab were dubbed *bhagoras* (those who had deserted p. 504) is a useful antidote to the stereotype that unlike the *mohajirs* from UP, Punjabi refugees were easily accepted in Pakistan. The volume's reflection on the two worlds of Punjab is, however, the most important and useful contribution to the subject matter of Partition. For this reason it is deserving of a wide readership.

The publishers are to be commended for the cartoon illustrations that beautifully complement the volume. It is a pity that the text could not have been more carefully proof read. This would have eliminated not only minor typos, but misspellings as of Churchill (p.201), Farzana Shaikh (p.52), Radcliffe (p. 265), Shah Almi (p.304) and Mudie and Begum Shah Nawaz throughout which do not do justice to the author's erudition.

Ian Talbot has written extensively on Punjab History and the Partition of India. His publications include, *Punjab and the Raj* (Manohar 1988); *Freedom's Cry* (OUP 1996); *Region and Partition, Punjab, Bengal and the Division of India* (jointly edited with Gurharpal Singh); *Khizr Tiwana, the Punjab Unionist Partition and the Partition of India* (OUP, 2002); *At The Epicentre of Violence; Voices of Punjabi Refugees in Amritsar* (jointly edited with D.S. Tatla). He currently holds Chair in British History at the University of Southampton. He was formerly Director of the Centre for South Asian Studies at Coventry University.

Universal Within
Local, Regional, National

Seema Alavi

A HUNDRED HORIZONS. THE INDIAN OCEAN IN THE AGE OF GLOBAL EMPIRE
By Sugata Bose
Permanent Black, Delhi, 2006, pp. 332, Rs. 695.00

This book brings the Indian Ocean forefront to the study of Empire, anti-colonial nationalism and ideas about globalization. It views the Ocean as the site where the local, regional and national intermingled with ideas of the universal. Together they constituted a sub-culture of tremendous economic and intellectual potential that could challenge the western global Empire. Sugata Bose focuses on this sub-culture that was the underbelly of Empire and sees it as an important propellant of anti-colonial nationalism. He laments that South Asian historiography has failed to integrate this referent to its larger narrative of nationalism and the formation of the nation state. He regrets that it has remained outside the purview of ideas of globalization as well.

Bose offers a scathing critique of territorial nationalism that has so far framed the researches of most brands of south Asian studies. And he hits out at the more recent postmodern forays into the history of the nation seen as a 'fragment' in what is viewed as an elite western derived nationalist discourse. Instead, Bose admirably connects the history of the Indian Ocean to that of landlocked India. He makes a strong case for seeing the real and imagined nation beyond the confines of territorially bound nation states. According to him territorial nationalism was sustained by its simultaneous contestations with the culturally and religiously defined ideas of universalism that are best enacted in the interregional space of the Indian Ocean. He concludes that the interconnectedness of the land and the Ocean offers a window into the myriad articulations of universalism, globalization and modernity that date the pre-colonial era. They continue, albeit reformulated, in the global age of Empire and make us rethink the monopolistic claim of the West on these concepts.

This book comes as a refreshing breather to students of South Asian history who have had an overdose of colonial subjecthood narratives that have coloured both elite and subaltern narratives of nationalism and the nation state. It opens new ways of looking at the ingeniousness of subjects in the heyday of global Empire. Bose provides answers to questions that all of us have been hesitant to ask so far: How far did people carry the colonial subject burden? According to Bose as unitary sovereignty and princely autocracy substituted the pre-colonial idea of shared sovereignty, colonial India and its subjects increasingly defended Britain's imperial frontiers: the Gulf sheikhdoms now had British officials that reported to India. In the East, Penang, Singapore and Malacca came under Calcutta's jurisdiction. Indian soldiers fought the 1903 Gulf war for the Empire. And Delhi remained the command sector until 1918. At the same time Indians travelled across to West and South East Asia as merchants, capitalists, and labourers. They worked for the Empire. However, being subjects of the Empire did not clip their creative imagination in any way. Bose shows how they interconnected with Chinese and other Asian counterparts, forged links amongst themselves across region and religious lines, accommodated religious difference and multiple ideas of the national and universal, and welded into a critical resource base. This could be tapped to give that extra push to the anti-colonial cause from outside the territorial confines of India. It could also serve as an alternate model of a nation state. One that was sustained through recognition of cultural and religious difference, rather than demarcated sharply from it in the manner of its western counterpart.

The stories of the loyal soldiers of the British Indian army who weathered

This book comes as a refreshing breather to students of South Asian history who have had an overdose of colonial subjecthood narratives that have coloured both elite and subaltern narratives of nationalism and the nation state.

it out in the two World Wars are far too well known. Muslim soldiers fighting Turkey in the First World War, and the brave Gurkhas of the Second World War have been since immortalized in museums, autobiographies of British generals, military histories, films and fiction. But what is less known is what this loyalty meant to the fashioning of the nation that was being imagined at a feverish pace in these war years? This is a question which has rarely been asked for fear of upsetting the singular narrative of territorial nationalism that has dominated Indian history writing. Bose reinforces the works of Ayesha Jalal, C.A Bayly, Tim Harper and others who question the postmodern simplistic imaginings of the nation state narrowly confined within the binary of colonial power relations. Through fascinating new material and letters of Indian soldiers, many of them Muslims fighting in the Gulf, he shows how their sense of Muslim universalism combined with anti-colonial nationalism even as they fought for the Empire. Across the Ocean interregional arena these men rarely had just the British Empire and the territorial Indian nation as the two ends of their choice options. They thought through their identities and loyalties in more complex ways. Thus the Indian soldier Kazi Nazrul Islam in Iraq, who later became famous as the revolutionary poet of Bengal, penned a Bengali soldier's farewell message to that country. This expressed grief for the common loss of independence of his own homeland and of Iraq. And yet there were other identities and choices too that had to be juggled. As the case of Shah Nawaz Khan, the British Indian soldier turned INA recruit, shows. Islamic universalism for him posed no problems in making a choice for Subhash Chandra Bose's appeal to join the INA. But this was also not initially out of any patriotism but as response to the dejection he experienced being ordered to surrender to the Japanese in 1942. His political choice for INA came only later when he heard Subhash Chandra Bose deliver a speech. As he said, he made his considered choice for the INA then, because he saw for the first time 'India through the eyes of an Indian'.

Bose shows how both Gandhi and Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose tapped this 'diasporic public sphere' that was ingeniously carved out by Indians as historical subjects in their own rights. He traces the career of Gandhi in South Africa and Bose in the period of the Second World War in south East Asia to show how their anti-colonial nationalism was derived from the multiple, real and imaginary, notions of nation that intermingled with the global and religiously defined universalistic strains in expatriates. This accommodation of cultural difference rather than western derived 'secular' notion of nation state was exported to India. It proved critical in the formation of the idea of nation that was specific to the Indian context and not emulative of the West.

That the nation in the making was so multifaceted was evident in the travelogues of Muslim pilgrims to Mecca. As also in the travel literature of Tagore that described his visits to Muslim lands. Bose uses fascinating travel diaries of pilgrims to tell us the story of how during the international Haj pilgrimage the Muslim mind balanced the spiritual universal with its predicaments of being subjects in colonial India. Mecca became the site where the divine sovereignty offered the universal frame in which issues of temporal sovereignty like being subjects of Britain, the political fissures within the umma (community) and other conflicting identities were played out. Similarly, Tagore's sojourns to Baghdad and Iran, and his visits to the grave sites of Iranian poets, Saadi and Hafiz in Shiraz, reminded him of his own universalism even as he appreciated and dwelt in their worldview crafted in dance, poetry, and music. Bose sees this bonding and nostalgia for the past as an effort to contribute to the global futur. An alternate worldview and universalism to that offered by the western nation state model.

This is a sophisticated, lucid and fine history of the Indian Ocean region, which revolutionizes our landlocked thinking of anti-colonial nationalism, nation state, globalization and modernity. Historians and political scientists have questioned these concepts as being western derived. But their import to India through the experiences of Indian diasporic communities is less known. The value of the admirable scholarship on display here is that it adds a brand new perspective from the Ocean that comes as a welcome whiff of fresh air to those tired of landlocked narrow readings of India's colonial experience. However, one may hesitate to share entirely Bose's optimism about the adoption of the alternate nation state model of cultural and religious accommodation based on blood rather than rights that were experimented in the diaspora public sphere. It is not very clear what he implies here. But if the allusion is to the failure of the post-colonial 'secular' nation state, and its slippage into divisive religious majorityism, then one is not too sure if this is because it is entirely modelled on the western 'secular' model. Perhaps it is the combined legacy of the diasporic model and the British colonial one that frames our governance. That is a lead that this fascinating account of the early 20th century offers to the political scientists to chew on!

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Engaging with Geography and Space

Rupal Oza

COLONIAL AND POST-COLONIAL GEOGRAPHIES OF INDIA
Edited by Saraswati Raju, M. Satish Kumar and Stuart Corbridge
Sage Publication, Delhi, 2006, pp.368, Rs. 695.00

Colonial and Post-colonial Geographies of India, a collection of fifteen essays by scholars from India, western Europe, and the U.S., is a pointer to emerging critical geographical work on India, though it is not, as the editors point out in their introductory essay, the first time that geographers have invested in India. Colonial 'technologies of governance' mapped India through gazetteers, district reports, surveys and the census. The departments of geographies established during the colonial period were tasked with the discursive and literal mapping the country for imperial rule (p.14). Despite these rich documents, there is much that remains to be understood and revealed about both the colonial mapping of India as well as postcolonial geography of opposition. The editors for example point out that Gandhi's strategies of resistance employed a profoundly geographic politics of opposition to imperial rule which has received little attention. While much has been written about Nehru's vision of India, the imaginative, discursive, and material geography of modern nationhood mapped through dams, canals, roads, and industrial centers, has in comparison been neglected.

The neglect of critical geography, to which this collection is a much needed corrective, derives from the lineage of geographical departments in India. Post independence a 'new' generation of geographers focused on economic development and national integration (p.17). During this period regional development received particular focus based on priorities established by the Planning Commission (p.17). Research and pedagogy in Geography Departments therefore were predominantly focused on applied and economic geographical research. Critical geography of the sort that this collection explores was rarely if at all engaged with during this period. Since then however, scholarship began to change with evidence of interesting work on geo-politics of location, environmentalism, globalization in south Asia, and an atlas of men and women in India all of which point to an emerging trend in critical geographical research (p.18). This collection of essays is an important part of this emerging intellectual domain.

As one of the first of its kind to map an emerging field, the essays are disparate covering a wide range of topics, as would perhaps be expected in a collection covering research on a vast area as 'colonial and post-colonial geographies'. Yet the essays coalesce around five broad themes: mapping cities and spaces, neo-liberal political economic formations, boundaries, territoriality, and the linkages between the global and local.

Geographers have long engaged with spatio-political formation of cities. M. Satish Kumar explores the conflict over space from the sixteenth through eighteenth century in Madras. Drawing on Lefebvre and Foucault, Kumar begins by exploring the divisions between 'Black' and 'White' town reflecting the separation between the colonialists with the native part of the city on the basis of color and religion (p.32). The bulk of Kumar's essay though, deals with the manifestation of conflict between 'left and right' hand caste groups in space. These spatial divisions were based on the criteria of race, purity and pollution in Black town through a variety of symbols and idioms that were used as markers of territory (p.36). The conflict between the two caste groups centered on endowments to local temples, right to access temples, housing etc. Kumar traces conflicts in the form of riots from the mid seventeenth century until the end of the eighteenth in which the colonialists attempted caste regulation by strict spatial segregation between the groups. For the colonialists Kumar notes that the "caste based demarcations were tolerated and reinforced … to ensure continuity in their commercial ventures of profit-making" (p.39).

In a similar vein Stephen Legg explores the formation of New Delhi as a project of postcolonial modernity. Legg argues that attempts to deal with migration and growth of Delhi post Partition into rational divisions are well suited to examine the (dis)continuities with the colonial period (p.182). Drawing on Foucault's governmentality, Legg examines the plans for Delhi's development by the Delhi Municipal Organization which was tasked with addressing the "question of citizenry in a city and society previously governed by a colonial form of bureaucratic authoritarianism that had done little to encourage social education or popular governmental participation" (p.195). In addition, Legg examines the proposals by the Delhi Improvement Trust which recommended that housing be a priority of national welfare. The means by which to achieve this ironically revealed more continuities with the colonial government (p.198). The Delhi Improvement Trust's design influenced what became the Delhi Master Plan, which was used as a model for other towns throughout India. Both essays document spatial manifestations of colonial and postcolonial ideological investments in security, order, and modernity.

Neo-liberal policies in India have elicited excellent work that seeks to document the geographical particularities of socio-economic reform. Sharad Chari explores this in his essay by an examination of 'social labour' in Tiruppur. Social labour, Chari says, is drawn from Marx and can "address the deficiencies of social capital while recognizing that capital is always a product of work, or of human transformation of nature and space" (p.142). Tiruppur's industrial center that is engaged in the production of knitted undershirts predominantly for the export market responds to the seasonality of global production demands. While the changes in seasonality that directly impacts labour in Tiruppur, is a factor of North American and European markets, the owners use a variety of means with which to explain the fluctuations of the season and pass on the risks to the workers. Therefore Chari explains, "The implication is that places like Tiruppur don't just offer cheap labour, they offer the benefits of a complete package of social relations, of which low wages and insecure worker's rights are ingredients" (p.156). If social labour creates the conditions for accumulation, then Saraswati Raju's essays embellishes our understanding of the links between capital and patriarchy by problematizing meta-narratives and considers instead 'regional patriarchies' (p.101). Raju examines vocational training for women in Delhi and Chennai and examines the manner in which gender and caste intersect (in diverse ways in the two cities) to demonstrate the different ways in which patriarchal structures impeded women's lives. She compellingly argues that 'institutionalized patriarchies' permeate the domains of the home and state to generate a gendered geography of inequity even in circumstances of expanding labour markets (p.102). Yet, patriarchal structures in the case studies are shown to have 'cracks in the system' that ask for a more complex understanding of oppression and subversion than is assumed in the consideration of globalization. Chari and Raju's essays point to the socio-spatial connections at different scales generated in neo-liberal globalization. The fluctuations of the global have direct impact on local and regional patterns of work and structures of patriarchy.

Borders and boundary formation are sites of dynamic struggle and identity formation. Geographers have considered these issues in places that form the dividing line between nations where the mixing of cultures are juxtaposed against national and economic imperatives (Mexico and the United States, India and Pakistan and so on). Others have examined the creation of boundaries in efforts to differentiate 'us' from 'them' which has its legacies in the colonial enterprise. Alison Blunt's essay in this collection adds to this work through an interesting consideration of boundaries that are not spatially proximate, but are nevertheless profoundly intimate. Blunt's work focuses on the gendered geography of 'home' (India and England) at different scales of the Anglo- Indian community before and after independence. She is concerned about construction of place, belonging, and nationalism. Through an examination of archival documents and interviews Blunt explores the shifting nuances of identity that considers England the fatherland and India the motherland. It is in these identities that Anglo-Indian women embodied a 'western modernity' in dress and choice of nuclear family arrangements and their ability to mix freely with

men (p.60). In her interviews with women she considers some of the contemporary shifts of marriage and family life of Anglo-Indians who marry outside the community and the negotiations of identity and belonging that ensue. In the contemporary moment Blunt points out that the Anglo-Indians recast themselves as Indian by nationality but Anglo-Indian by community (p.67).

Juxtaposed with Blunt's essay and her consideration of boundaries is Richa Singh and Richa Nagar's exploration of boundaries between differently situated women who together create the *Sangtin Yatra*. Singh and Nagar deftly excavate the multiple positions and access to power held by differently situated authors of the collaborative book. They argue that the *Sangtin Yatra* explicitly contests representational practices where rural women are 'solicited, cajoled, encouraged to speak' so that 'developed' urban women 'may speak to one another about 'them'" (p.307). The authors reveal the hostile political responses from a national NGO to criticisms voiced in the *Sangtin Yatra.* The manner in which the book was authored by all sangtins challenged the innocence of knowledge production. While Blunt explores the politics of belonging among Anglo-Indians who negotiate home and nationality, Singh and Nagar explore the politics of alliances between unequally situated women. Both essays conclude that belonging and identity are troubled and persistently negotiated entities that traverse multiple social, political, material and spatial structures.

Stuart Corbridge and Edward Simpson examine the spatial logic of militant Hindu nationalism through what they term as 'traumatic spaces' (p.71). The "movement and definition of space and territory" argues Peter van der Veer "are central elements in religious nationalism."[1] Militant Hindu nationalism has since its inception been a profoundly geographic enterprise. While in existence for over eighty years, it was only in the 1980s that Hindu nationalists began to garner popularity and power. One of their first successful campaigns initiated in 1983 sought to draw multiple strands of Hinduism under one umbrella. The campaign entailed four chariot processions for unity called *Ektamatayajna* that traversed the length and breadth of the country passing through sites of religious significance. In addition to the four main processions many other smaller processions joined in, literally mapping the country as Hindu (p.73). Against the backdrop of the processions, Colbridge and Simpson examine contemporary Hindutva's efforts to claim India as Hindu through the dispute around the Ram temple in Ayodhya and the reconstruction efforts after the 2001 earthquake in Gujarat. The Ram temple in Ayodhya functions as a site of 'trauma' representative of besieged Hindus for whom, in the discourse of Hindutva, defence of the motherland and restored masculinity lies in the construction of the Ram temple (p.75). In Bhuj, the second traumatic space, remapping of space is through efforts to rebuild towns destroyed in the earthquake. In this reconstruction effort the new towns are renamed with Hindu names and sanitized from the presence of Muslims and Dalits (p.82). These traumatic spaces function not as discrete spaces but draw on the local to imagine the national.

Territoriality is explored by Robert W. Bradnock by examining six-decade long dispute between India and Pakistan in Jammu and Kashmir. Bradnock contests the notion that the significance of territorial sovereignty diminishes in globalization (p.83). The long dispute in Jammu and Kashmir is understood by the vested interests not only of both India and Pakistan but also of the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Since the Cold War the economic imperatives of neo-liberalism once again made Kashmir a central focus in discourses of security. Particularly since September 11, 2001 and the discourse of terror make India and Pakistan strategic in the US war with Afghanistan. US interests in India are also governed by efforts to present a bulwark against China. While for India, its ambitions for regional security and economic investment propel its alliances with the US. The production and reproduction of territoriality in both essays is understood at multiple scales. Both essays challenge the notion that territoriality may be becoming insignificant under globalization.

The production of the global and the local has been a critical site of inquiry to which geographers have made significant contributions. The essays that address this broad theme in this collection are no exception. Swapna Banerjee-Guha considers Mumbai as a global city that responds to the political, economic and cultural imperatives of global flows. Banerjee-Guha traces the restructuring plans for Mumbai that are dictated by the logic of a liberalizing economy rather than one that addresses social issues for the majority of the population. She places these priorities in Mumbai as part of a global trend in cities across the world (p.217). Mumbai's restructuring are governed by three aspects: India's place in the global economy, the development of high-tech information base that is required of global cities, and lastly, the privatization of infrastructure development that signals the retreat of the state from social responsibility. Banerjee-Guha generates a helpful flow chart of these changes she is concerned with connecting the global flows to real concrete urban policy changes (p.221).

Craig Jeffrey, Patricia Jeffery and Roger Jeffery in their essay explore the lives of marginalized young men in Utter Pradesh and the impact of education in their lives. They engage in research on social strategies of educated un/underemployed youth and address the neglect of research on young men where most studies have focused on women. Examining the lives of three young men who have had access to education, they suggest that "Modern education acts as a type of discursive 'scaffold' on which people place their ideas about progress, culture and civility" (p.239). Their research on education points to connection between global transformations and the lives of local actors. Many of these changes point to change in the relationship between the young men and the land in which by the beginning of the twenty-first century those connected to land according to these men symbolized their backwardness.

In exploring the politics of global-scale climate exchanges Paul Robbins argues that local-scales costs are overlooked rationalized and assumed away (p.280). Robbins draws attention to the UN Convention on Climate Change in 1992 in Rio, Brazil in which the reduction of carbon emissions was a major goal. Under the Kyoto Protocol industrialized countries could engage in 'green development projects' in other nations (such as India and China) and if these projects resulted in 'Certified emission reductions (CERs) then "that would count towards the industrialized countries' commitments" to reduce carbon emissions (p.283). In a well documented critique of such a global exchange, Robbins contends that "such practices represent the production of *exchange value,* necessarily making complex and highly localized social and ecological systems (like forests) commensurable in a system of universal equivalence, money value or 'credits' of carbon produced, averted, or captured" (p.286). Forests and sub-agricultural zones are transformed from 'waste' becoming valued as carbon. Furthermore, the commodification of these resources through the global exchange adversely impacts the livelihood of people who depend on these forests which become inaccessible to them in the discourse of preservation that bans harvesting. "Therefore, these traditionally difficult-to-commodify *use values* become available for exchange only at the expense of the local communities that depend upon them (p.286). In the logic of colonialism the north passes the burden of sustainable development to the south (p.296). These three essays in unique ways unravel the connections between the global and the local. It is those at the margins who are neglected and forgotten generating a skewed geography of development and visibility.

The richness of this collection is in the vast array of subjects it deals with offering a panorama of critical geographical research. At the same time however, the vast difference in topics also diffuses the focus of the collection. As all edited work, essays are uneven in the way they engage with geography and space. These limitations notwithstanding this is an important collection that is accessible drawing together some of the most important work on colonial and postcolonial geographies in India.

Reference

[1] Peter Van der Veer *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994): xii.

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Timeless Hunger

Srimanjari

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By Malabika Chakrabarti
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> 'In the first half of nineteenth century, there were seven famines, with an estimated total of one and a half million deaths from famine. In the second half of nineteenth century, there were twenty-four famines (six between 1851 and 1876, and eighteen between 1876 and 1900), with an estimated total according to official records, of over 20 million deaths'.
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The British insisted that they had rescued India from "timeless hunger". However, in 1878 Indian nationalist writers quoted from the prestigious *Journal of the Statistical Society* that there were 31 serious famines in 120 years of British rule against only 17 recorded famines in the entire previous two millennia. Malabika Chakrabarti's study of the famine of 1896-97 in Bengal is an important contribution in the field of area studies in long-term dearth. The famine of 1896-97 was the most devastating of its kind since the Orissa famine of 1866-67. The famine was caused by crop deficiency due to both crop failure and supply failure in the grain market. Thus, in the author's estimate both food availability decline (FAD) and failure of exchange entitlement (FEE) within the peasant economy, in the form of lack of purchasing capacity of the peasant society, need to be analysed in order to understand the reasons for the food crisis developing into a famine in 1896-97. While the focus is on the famine, the author widens the canvas by raising issues related to ecology, market mechanism, demography, nutrition, and gender relations. The work evokes larger questions related to anachronisms present in a rural society.

Numerous studies have drawn attention to the monoculture of rice in the pattern of crop distribution in Bengal. By the end of the nineteenth century, as far as food crops are concerned, there was a near total dependence on rice cultivation in eastern India. The cultivation of other food crops and commercial crops like jute, indigo, poppy was on a far lesser scale. Ecological imbalances and exogenous factors as wars affected the availability of rice and its price structure. The colonial government continued to treat famines as catastrophic events and failed to develop long-term plans to deal with the recurring crisis. It remained unbending in its adherence to the *laissez-faire* policy of leaving the import of rice to the deficit areas in the hands of private traders. In the case of the famine of 1866, government in an ostrich-like manner rigidly held on to the laissez faire policy. This aggravated food shortage because in several parts of Bengal, private channels of trade gauged

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the incapacity of the starving to purchase food and refrained from importing food despite the high prices. During the famine of 1873-74, the government did render help by importing grain, but kept aloof in 1896-97.

There was a general shortfall in agricultural production throughout eastern India in 1896-1897. For instance, in the Santhal Parganas the normal production was about 15 million maunds. The deficit in 1896 was estimated to be around 6.5 million maunds. The shortfall in production was reported from several districts of Bengal. The famine of 1896-97 was thus mainly a rice famine caused by the large-scale failure of the winter rice crop. The deficit in rice cultivation would have been mitigated by the cash crops and jungle produce like *mahua* flowers. However, in 1896 even these produce that had provided some respite during times of crisis failed. The situation resulted in a sharp increase in prices. An important point that Malabika Chakrabarti makes is that price stimulus failed to attract supplies from surplus to scarcity and from scarcity to famine tracts. Exports continued during years of food-crisis, grain loans were not forthcoming and charity dried up. The author studies about fifteen districts of Bengal where food shortage assumed famine proportions and concludes that the class of small peasant proprietors, wage labourers and artisans were the worst hit. These districts were more susceptible to market penetration and expansion of trade (including changes in the local market) due to relative absence of diverse non-agricultural occupations and decline of existing professions. Amartya Sen's entitlement thesis and Paul Greenough's analysis of the breakdown of the traditional social order based on *annadata-posya* relationship is drawn upon to highlight the fact that a patron-client relationship between unequally endowed classes (the mahajans and zamindars on the one hand, and the subordinate classes of rural society on the other) failed to bear the strain of economic crisis in 1896.

Social tensions that remained dormant during normal times, surfaced during times of crisis like the famine. The author discusses the increasing crime rate in the form of occasional grain riots and looting, migrations from the famine affected regions and the heightened distress. However, there is rarely a discussion on the buying capacity of the industrial city of Calcutta and the military needs of the Empire. Thus, while the author has painstakingly reconstructed a detailed account of the famine of 1896-97, mainly from original sources, the question of export of rice from the rice-deficit areas has not been explored fully to incorporate the pulls of the military and other needs of the empire. Although these official accounts are extremely insightful, regretfully, there is an over-dependence on them. Had the author coordinated the use of colonial discourse with the insights drawn from contemporary Bengali literary and non-literary sources like the journals *Anushilan o Purohit, Bangadarshan, Bandhab*, etc., and newspaper accounts (which the author has consulted sparingly), the narrative would have illustrated the underlying tensions of rural society with greater sensitivity. That the author has also not deemed it necessary to describe the political fallout of the famine, at a time when the educated middle-class of Bengal was becoming increasingly restive and active within the Indian National Congress and other regional associations, is surprising. The book should nevertheless be appreciated for aiming to perform the difficult task of treatment of a famine both as an 'event' and a 'process'.

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Kumkum Roy

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The critical edition is the product of a scrupulous adherence to an apparently simple set of principles—adopting readings that are common to most of the manuscripts while indicating variations, including additional/alternative verses in the translation and the text, preferring difficult readings over simpler variants, and engaging constantly in a dialogue with the multiple strands of the commentarial tradition. In presenting the text, Olivelle also draws attention to its distinctive style—to the dialogic mode that distinguishes it from the earlier *Dharmasastras,* and the versification that replaces the cryptic *sastras* of the earlier Sanskritic tradition. What is also interesting is the latent Prakritisms that Olivelle delicately excavates; evident, for instance, in verses where the Prakrit *bhoti* meaning 'becomes', fits the metre better than the Sanskrit *bhavati* (e.g. p.921). These suggest, as indeed is evident elsewhere, that many of the verses of the text, especially those that have a proverbial tone, were adapted from floating traditions in a variety of languages.

At another level, Olivelle addresses issues that have been debated for several decades. Pioneering scholars such as Buhler and Kane had argued for a composite text, which took shape over centuries. This understanding rested, amongst other things, on the fact that the text proclaimed contradictory positions on a range of issues. Olivelle offers a plausible explanation for these contradictions—suggesting, on the one hand, that they represent the inevitable variations between precept and practice, and that, on the other hand, they are the fruit of a process of anthologizing, whereby traditions, even if divergent, had to be accommodated within the text. This in turn leads him to argue that the text is relatively unitary rather than composite. Consequently, he locates its composition/compilation in c. second century CE, closer to the terminal date assigned to the text by earlier scholars. He also points out that the effective closure of the text coincides with the beginning of the commentarial tradition, which is particularly rich in the case of the *Mânava Dharmasâstra.*

At another level, Olivelle persuasively builds up a case for unitary authorship by drawing attention to what he defines as the deeper structural regularities that underlie the apparent inconsistencies in the content of the text. He bases his argument partly on the arrangement of the sections on *vyavahâra* or law. This, he suggests, is far more logical in the *Mânava Dharmasâstra* in comparison to other texts, moving as it does from individual and group disputes to criminal and personal law, and questions of public order.

As an extension of this, he outlines an alternative structure for the entire text, suggesting divisions that do not necessarily correspond to those of the available reactions. While this is an interesting possibility, the logic of the existing organization of the text also requires explanation. Besides, the textual strategies, including the use of typical verses and verbs, which Olivelle identifies as marking shifts in subject-matter do not always operate in the ways in which he suggests they do. While these are fairly accurately identified in the sections dealing with statecraft and legal matters, they are not so neatly located elsewhere. As a result, Olivelle resorts to defining sections that do not fit in within his scheme of things as excursus. To cite just one instance of the incongruities that result: one of the two introductory cosmogonic narratives is classified as an excursus (p. 88). However, it is not separated from the first by the verses/ terms that Olivelle recognizes as markers of sections/sub sections. In effect, the resolution of the dilemma of recovering and respecting the logic(s) of the text and reconciling this with present-day notions of consistency remains somewhat uneasy.

Olivelle also engages with the larger issues of context, and locates the *Mânava Dharmasâstra's* concern with *dharma* within the post-Mauryan world, where the message of Asokan inscriptions provided a challenge to the brahmanical order that had to be addressed in complex ways. Identifying the author of the *dharmasâstra* as the primeval man/king was obviously in consonance with the preoccupations of this enterprise. In fact, Olivelle establishes that the king and the *brâhmana* constitute the two focal points of the text—their concerns are represented in over 70% of the verses. There is also the more specific context of the *sâstric* tradition. Olivelle dwells at length on the nature of the *sâstra* in general, on the notion of expertise and specialization, and on the complex mediations between traditions and social realities. It is this nuanced understanding of text and context that informs the enterprise of editing and translating.

Turning to the translation itself, what strikes one is the unpretentious, conscientious rendering that is provided. This proves to be extremely useful both for the curious lay reader as well as for the specialist. There are no dramatic flourishes: what we find instead is a careful statement of problems, most of which are flagged for the reader. At the very outset, for instance, the difficulties in translating cosmogonic concepts are acknowledged (p. 88, 239). The endnotes provided for the translation are equally illuminating: many of them allow access to the vibrant commentarial tradition that developed around the text as well as provide an opportunity to compare Olivelle's translation with those of his predecessors. Scholarly disagreements are explicitly but quietly acknowledged. In other instances, the meaning of the text is elucidated. In fact, ideally these should have featured as footnotes: see for instance the note on verse 16, chapter 2, which delimits the audience of the text. Here, Olivelle explains (p.245) with characteristic understatement that the implications of the verse are to exclude women and *sûdras* from access to the text.

Overall, the translation leaves little to be desired and much to be thankful for. Nonetheless, there are points where one wishes the treatment of the text was more explicit. There are times when the translation fails to foreground the sharply gendered nature of the text. For instance, the translation of verse 109, chapter 2 is as follows:

> The son of his teacher, a person who offers obedient service, a person who has given him knowledge, a virtuous person, an honest person, someone close to him, a capable man, someone who gives him money, a good man, and one who is his own: these ten may be taught the Veda in accordance with the Law (p.100).

The use of the apparently gender-neutral term 'person' glosses over the fact that all the words used in Sanskrit (p.422) are in masculine forms. A similar strategy affects the translation of the term *pitr* (e.g. p. 464), literally 'father', and by extension 'patrilineal ancestor,' which is rendered by the more general term 'ancestor (p.113).

It is also rather odd to find diacritics used for three of the four *varn?as,* while the term *brâhmana* is rendered as 'brahmin' (e.g. p.88). This is an instance where the brahmanical identity seems to have been naturalized, and incorporated rather unproblematically within the English rendition, instead of being allowed at least terminological parity with the other *varnas.* What is equally intriguing is the use of the term 'class' to translate *varna*

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Turning to the translation itself, what strikes one is the unpretentious, conscientious rendering that is provided. This proves to be extremely useful both for the curious lay reader as well as for the specialist. There are no dramatic flourishes: what we find instead is a careful statement of problems, most of which are flagged for the reader. At the very outset, for instance, the difficulties in translating cosmogonic concepts are acknowledged (p. 88, 239). The endnotes provided for the translation are equally illuminating: many of them allow access to the vibrant commentarial tradition that developed around the text as well as provide an opportunity to compare Olivelle's translation with those of his predecessors. Scholarly disagreements are explicitly but quietly acknowledged. In other instances, the meaning of the text is elucidated. In fact, ideally these should have featured as footnotes: see for instance the note on verse 16, chapter 2, which delimits the audience of the text. Here, Olivelle explains (p.245) with characteristic understatement that the implications of the verse are to exclude women and *sûdras* from access to the text.

Overall, the translation leaves little to be desired and much to be thankful for. Nonetheless, there are points where one wishes the treatment of the text was more explicit. There are times when the translation fails to foreground the sharply gendered nature of the text. For instance, the translation of verse 109, chapter 2 is as follows:

> The son of his teacher, a person who offers obedient service, a person who has given him knowledge, a virtuous person, an honest person, someone close to him, a capable man, someone who gives him money, a good man, and one who is his own: these ten may be taught the Veda in accordance with the Law (p.100).

The use of the apparently gender-neutral term 'person' glosses over the fact that all the words used in Sanskrit (p.422) are in masculine forms. A similar strategy affects the translation of the term *pitr* (e.g. p. 464), literally 'father', and by extension 'patrilineal ancestor,' which is rendered by the more general term 'ancestor (p.113).

It is also rather odd to find diacritics used for three of the four *varn?as,* while the term *brâhmana* is rendered as 'brahmin' (e.g. p.88). This is an instance where the brahmanical identity seems to have been naturalized, and incorporated rather unproblematically within the English rendition, instead of being allowed at least terminological parity with the other *varnas.* What is equally intriguing is the use of the term 'class' to translate *varna*

(e.g. p.105). Admittedly, *varna* is a rather intractable category that defies easy conversion into other social and /or linguistic registers. But acknowledging such difficulties may have been better than suggesting equivalences that are at best approximate.

One can also quibble over the translation of specific terms; I was not quite sure whether 'malcontent' (p. 101) effectively captures the sense of *asûyaka* (p. 423)—with its connotations of being jealous or envious. The translation of the term as 'resentment' (p. 132) is certainly more apposite. These problems surface in the translation of some relatively technical terms as well: for instance, *vidhâna* (p. 383) is rendered as 'ordinance' (p.87). The commentarial gloss (p.237) indicates that the term conveyed a range of meanings—from suggesting relationship with the Vedas to that with the *sâstras* in general. It would have been useful if the translation gave a sense of these complexities instead of relegating them to the endnotes. Also somewhat problematic is the rendering of the terms *prabhu* and *isvara* (e.g. p. 386, p.615) as 'Lord' (e.g. p. 88, p.150), which seems to have an almost Biblical undertone, as indeed does the translation of *œruti* as 'scripture' (p. 95, although elsewhere, e.g. p. 102, it is more appropriately rendered as 'vedic knowledge') and *nâstika* as 'infidel' (ibid.). Other terms that one wished were translated differently include *moksa* rendered as 'renunciation' (p.150) instead of 'liberation', the option adopted by Buhler and Doniger. Somewhat uncharacteristically, Olivelle dismisses this possibility as 'overly literal' (p. 290). Moreover, in the context of kingship, the term *dan?d?a* is occasionally translated as 'military force' (e.g. p.159). While this is plausible, the wider connotations of *danda* in terms of a monopoly over judicial authority probably needed to be accommodated as well. More problematic is the translation of the term *vadha* (prescribed as punishment for a *sûdra* who assaulted a *brâhmana*) as corporal punishment (p.181), ignoring the possibility of the narrower but stronger connotation of a death penalty. Olivelle acknowledges this possibility elsewhere (p.319), but it perhaps needed to be foregrounded in the translation rather than being relegated to the endnotes.

Some of the richness of the original is also, perhaps unnecessarily, whittled down in the translation. The term *dudoha* for instance (p. 387) is rendered as 'squeezed out' (p. 88), although it is acknowledged (p. 239) that the term 'evokes the image of milking a cow'. Allowing the (in this case bovine) imagery to surface in the translation would have conveyed a sense of cultural specificities which could have enriched our understanding of the text. Besides, there is occasional scope for confusion. One is not told, for instance, why the *râksas* are mentioned as such in some cases (e.g. p.118), and get converted into fiends elsewhere (e.g. p. 119).

The volume includes an index of verses with parallels in other texts within the *Dharma* tradition. This is certainly useful: what one would have wished for, additionally, is a listing of parallels with the *Bhagavad Gîta*—several *pâdas* contain familiar resonances and, in many cases, identical phrases. Collating these would have enriched our understanding of the text. Also, one wishes that about fifty verses in Chapter VII dealing with the notion of *daiva*, fate, which occur in some of the manuscripts, had been translated as an appendix to the main text, just as they have been placed in the critical edition. The very location of these verses, in the context of warfare and kingship, provides insights into the way these processes and institutions were visualized within the textual tradition.

These problems, however, do little to detract from what is in fact a monumental work, one, moreover, where words are, more often than not, carefully weighed and delicately contextualized. Consider for instance the term *krtrima* (literally artificial), used for a category of sons, which is rendered as 'constituted' (p. 199) conveying the sense of a person who was chosen on account of his qualities. Or the term *dhrti*, used in the context of modes of livelihood, translated as fortitude (p.214), with a laconic comment in the endnotes (p.338):

> Commentators take it to mean being content with little, but that is hardly a way to obtain a livelihood.

At the outset Olivelle admits that he undertook the enterprise without quite realizing its mammoth implications. All serious students of early Indian history (and others as well) should be grateful for this lack of foresight—it has, in fact, resulted in a volume that will be of immense value for decades to come.■

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History as 'Passion'

Jaya Tyagi

EVERYDAY LIVES, EVERYDAY HISTORIES: BEYOND THE KINGS AND BRAHMANAS OF 'ANCIENT INDIA'
By Uma Chakravarti
Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2006, pp.328, Rs. 595.00

Reconstructing ancient society has always been a challenging task for a historian. How do we shrug off the 'baggage' of modernity that we carry and relocate ourselves in the (very distant) past so as to be accurate? The only way to do it is with curiosity and with honesty—approach the 'sources' with an open and eager mind, without preconceived notions, which is what is being attempted in this compilation of articles written over a period of roughly two decades. Uma Chakravarti, in her incredibly inquisitive and penetrating style, moves, quite literally, 'beyond' hackneyed discussions of state, political institutions and the caste system, to highlight lives of wideranging groups and communities which played a significant role, but have been treated cursorily by most historians. She seeks to 'represent' Ancient India with essays related to peasants, servile labour, *dasas* and *karmakaras*, widows, monks and householders and the *bhaktin*; hitherto grey areas of historical studies and in doing so, reveals how methods of production, processes of social stratification, creation of ideological structures and institutions are inherently linked to each other.

The book begins with an introduction entitled 'History as Practice', a revealing chapter on how Uma Chakravarti evolves as a teacher and a 'practicer' of history. A must read for all academics, it reveals how one who is deeply involved and passionate about history can motivate others to read, research, and revel in the issues that are close to their hearts. The chapter, even while taking us through Uma's personal journey as a historian, is full of details—how historical perceptions change from the colonial period to the nationalist period; the contribution of D.D. Kosambi; how Dev Raj Chanana and R.S. Sharma brought attention to marginal groups; how Buddhist texts are oriented differently as compared to Brahmanical sources. In the course of an absorbing discussion on changing historiography set against the backdrop of the women's movement in India, the readers are introduced to the crucial issue of gender in history and how she along with Kumkum Roy, have helped change perceptions towards ancient India in such a way that no historian can ever find it imbued with 'golden hues', especially with respect to women. If history is a study of continuity with change, this chapter shows us how the predilection for 'marginal groups' would finally lead Uma Chakravarti to bring women's issues to the mainstream of historical research. Drawing attention to the intricate relationship between caste, class and patriarchy, her work inspires feminist scholarship, draws attention to the need to recover ancient sources and rediscover colonial, nationalist attitudes.

Uma Chakravarti skillfully connects the modern with the ancient, peeling off varied layers of fixed perceptions and misconceptions that have constantly coloured our notions of early Indian history. In the provocative, 'Whatever happened to the Vedic Dasi?' she shows how oriental, occidental and nationalist perceptions on 'women's status,' had commonalities and how Altekar's work eulogizing the Vedic period for women, had actually emerged as a defensive mechanism against the colonial projection of Indians as an emasculated, vanquished community that ill treated its women. In a brilliantly constructed argument imploring scholars to move beyond the 'Altekarian paradigm', (her exposure to Law and Jurisprudence as a Law student is evident), she shows how this develops: "What was gradually and carefully constituted, brick by brick, in the interaction between colonialism and nationalism is now so deeply embedded in the consciousness of the middle classes, that ideas about the past have assumed the status of revealed truths… But for women in particular, this heritage, is almost a burden. It has led to a narrow and limiting circle in which the image of Indian womanhood has become both a shackle and a rhetorical device that nevertheless functions as a historical truth". This is where Uma Chakravarti's contribution is significant—she has shown how it is not only ancient customs and social traditions, but modern interpretations of the past that have played a role in constructing ideologies which severely limit and marginalize women even now. In 'Conceptualizing Brahmanical Patriarchy', she develops the argument further, revealing how patriarchal traditions have deep roots in literary traditions of the subcontinent, which, irrespective of whether they are Brahmanical or Buddhist, caution against women's inherent nature, *strisvabhava*, which was fickle, weak, treacherous and libidinous and had to be controlled through strict codes, constructed as *stridharma*, based on which women were expected to mould themselves as ideal wives and mothers.

The essays highlight how marginalization of women and stratification of society on the basis of caste and class are concurrent developments—the structure of the state and brahmanical ideology played a considerable role in ensuring that stratas and distinctions were maintained in ancient India. Emphasizing on social reality, rather than dwelling only on theoretical constructs, she focusses on production activities and relations of production that emerge between producers and consumers. In the chapter on the peasant in early India, not only is the peasant described as a social and economic category, the distinction between the peasant producer and the landowner, *gahapati* is recognized. Labour and its value in social and economic terms, its extraction and exploitation, are issues that are explored in the context of servile labour and hired labour, the dasas and karmakaras. The interrelationship between gender, caste and labour is extended and brought out in the discussion on Widowhood, wherein Chakravarti shows how widowhood entailed 'social death' for high caste widows, whereas lower caste widows were exploited materially as well as sexually.

The book delves into the different sources with ease—Brahmanical notions are pitted against Buddhist traditions, highlighting the distinctions between them. Moving effortlessly from Vedic sources, to the epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, to the *Vinaya* and *Sutta Pitakas* and the *Jatakas*, the vast repository of literary traditions are explored to bring to life 'everyday lives' . However, a word of caution is necessary here as the ease with which the essays move from one literary tradition to the other, even within individual essays, may imply that while dealing with ancient India, we are dealing with one large undifferentiated continuum or that these texts represent social reality at a given period. Even though the texts are dealt with sequentially in the articles, and it is a difficult task to fix dates for many of the texts, a careful analysis of chronology, especially while dealing with ancient literary works is required. The point needs to be made that Brahmanical texts are themselves severely stratified, as are Buddhist texts.

This aside, the manner in which legends, stories and myths are explored show how the study of early traditions is important for understanding the psyche of those who invented these traditions and also those who passed them on from generation to generation. With deft sweeps Uma Chakravarti is able to explore why the nation came to a halt while watching the *Ramayana* television serial, or why custodians of saffron history while floundering in their attempt to carve an identity of their own, needed to resurrect a 'celibate' hero from the past, Chanakya. She shows how the Jatakas, with their treatment of women, men and beasts are repositories of information for ancient times and also explores the reasons why they survived as 'popular' tradition. The articles not only connect disparate chronological phases—the modern with the ancient, and disparate traditions—Brahmanical and Buddhist, elitist and popular, traditional and unconventional; but also seek to bring out spatial interlinkages—the inner with the outer—thus interests and emotions within the family are sought to be situated within the enveloping stratified society while the *bhaktin*, influenced by her inner spiritual needs, uses her body to escape from orthodox religious traditions, turning them 'upside down'. It is these connections and linkages which allow us to have a more comprehensive understanding of ancient India—indeed it is a treat to find these varied articles in one compilation. In reality, the articles show us that attempting to carve out the identities of certain groups actually enhances our understanding of the 'others' too and thus, even while focusing on 'others', this book actually also enriches our understanding of kings as well as brahmanas.

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A Varied Collection

Kunal Chakrabarti

INTERROGATING HISTORY: ESSAYS FOR HERMANN KULKE
Edited by Martin Brandtner and Shishir Kumar Panda
Manohar, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 392, Rs. 875.00

...we learn that during Kulke's first trip to India, when he was a student at Friedburg, he had visited the Madurai temple but was denied entry by the priests. This made him resolve to work on the Hindu temple, an accident of history that eventually had a profound impact on Indian historiography.

These essays have been put together in honour of Professor Hermann Kulke, one of the finest historians of his generation of pre-modern India. Although Kulke's list of publications covers many aspects of the history of India, Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia, he is particularly known for his contribution to the study of regional state formation and construction of regional identities in early medieval India. His 'concentric integration' model that suggests three stages in a continuous process of state formation from a nuclear core territory to the imperial regional state was a major advance on the hegemonic feudal state model, and his monumental study of the cult of Jagannatha and the regional tradition of Orissa remains one of the best examples of an interdisciplinary work of its kind that highlights the origin, development and organization of a regional tradition. Professor Kulke eminently deserves a felicitation volume.

The book is divided into three parts, the first of which is on historiography. It contains a short piece on Kulke's contribution to the study of Indian history by the two editors of the volume. Unfortunately, it is more descriptive than evaluative. However, there is interesting information on his personal involvement with India. For instance, we learn that during Kulke's first trip to India, when he was a student at Friedburg, he had visited the Madurai temple but was denied entry by the priests. This made him resolve to work on the Hindu temple, an accident of history that eventually had a profound impact on Indian historiography.

There is a detailed survey of literature on the archaeology of Orissa by Kishor Basa, a schematic statement on the worse in Indian history by Dietmar Rothermund, but the best essay in this section is by Bhairabi Prasad Sahu on the historiography of the early Indian state. He takes us on a fascinating journey through the voluminous literature on the subject, beginning with the imperialist and nationalist historians and culminating in the works of the proponents of the current debates that centre on the feudal, segmentary and integrative polity models. One cannot disagree with his conclusion that these labels have proved prohibitive, but the models are not necessarily opposed to each other, for the integrative paradigm is actually embedded in and forms an extension of the same social formation approach of Indian feudalism.

The next section on issues in South and South-east Asian history begins with two dense and technical essays on reading the Hatigumpha inscription of Kharavela by Snigdha Tripathy and the 'date formula' in early Sri Lankan inscriptions by Harry Falk. Aloka Parasher Sen has discussed the conceptions of time and associatively of history and memory in Indian tradition with special reference to the Tantras. She argues that time was considered as linear in the immediate past and cyclical in the distant past, and the two coalesced at the critical juncture of the present. Time was thus viewed in different dimensions and at different levels, depending on the context, but was ultimately defined in terms of a large whole. In a very interesting essay on India's trade contact with the Roman empire, Ranabir Chakravarti has focused on a unique document of a loan-contract of mid-second century AD between two parties concerning the shipment of highly valuable Indian commodities on board the vessel Hermapollon, lying at anchor at Muziris on the west coast of India and bound for a port on the Red Sea. From a close reading of this contract and other supplementary evidence Chakravarti has worked out the volume and value of Rome's trade with India in such rare luxury goods as Gangetic nard, the extensive hinterland of the port of Muziris, and the role of the Bay of Bengal network in the outstanding rise of Muziris in the western Indian ocean trade.

Hans Bakker's essay on the centrality of Vidisha in the Gupta-Vakataka relationship is marked by a particularly innovative use of creative literature to unravel the intricacies of a political process. Especially commendable is his reading of the *Malavikagnimitra*, a play by Kalidasa on the blossoming of love between its two young protagonists, as an unmistakable political allegory. However, despite such nuanced reading of texts, Bakker arrives at a surprisingly simplistic conclusion that the Gupta-Vakataka relationship was far from cordial, except during the interlude of Prabhavati Gupta. This is the standard history of the relationship, included in all recent textbooks on the dynastic history of early India. Upinder Singh has discussed the royal land-grant inscriptions from Orissa and adjacent regions from the fourth to mid-twelfth century AD in the backdrop of the explanatory models that are in use for an understanding of the early medieval period. After a thorough analysis of the contents of over three hundred epigraphs, Singh seems to suggest that the explanatory models have been of limited value for such studies. She unambiguously argues that the preoccupation with the Indian feudalism thesis has inhibited rather than encouraged meaningful studies of the literature, religion and philosophy, and art and architecture of early medieval India. Though Singh favours the alternative hypothesis that highlights integration and state formation, she has emphasized the need to go beyond the established paradigms.

The third section, on politics of identity and culture, has the largest number of essays. These are on themes as diverse as the Oriya movement and Singhbhum by Nivedita Mohanty, popular perceptions of Mahatma Gandhi in colonial Orissa by Chandi Prasad Nanda, the problems of 'decolonizing' Orissa and its aftermath by Biswamoy Pati, the cultural and epistemic ramifications of Captain Macpherson's account of the mythology of the Kondhs—a tribal group in Orissa by George Pfeffer and a Shaivite version of the manual of worship of Lord Jagannatha by G.C. Tripathi. Two essays by Ishita Banerjee-Dube and Yaaminey Mubayi on religion and politics in the management of the Jagannatha temple in the colonial and postcolonial period are complementary to each other. While Banerjee-Dube argues that the takeover of the management of the temple by the state of Orissa has not improved matters because the state lacks the Hindu raja's moral authority to arbitrate in the religious affairs of the temple, Mubayi points out that the dichotomy between the power of custom and the mechanisms of state authority have continuously prevented any sustainable effort in temple management. In a short essay Joanna Williams argues with insight how a complex built in 1750 AD around a small spring in Khallikot by Aparajita Balukeshwara, a ruler of one of the former minor states of southern Orissa, represents a significant cosmological vision. The other point of interest in the essay is the explication of the manner in which the trope of Ganga was invoked at a very local level to legitimize a political authority in crisis.

Even though a little uneven in quality, most essays in this volume are rigorously researched and address important issues. However, the book suffers from a shortcoming common to many such collections, i.e., a lack of thematic focus. The editors did make an attempt to sort the essays out into three sections, presumably in terms of some thematic coherence, but the essays are too diverse to fit into any such arrangement. A certain variety in a collection like this is certainly permissible, but one wonders how an essay on the horse in Indian history or on Rabindranath Tagore in Myanmar came to be included in this volume. The common thread that obviously runs through most of the essays is the history of Orissa, and those who specialize in it will benefit most from this volume.■

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More Than Just Money

Upinder Singh

COINS IN INDIA: POWER AND COMMUNICATION
Edited by Himanshu Prabha Ray
Marg, Mumbai, Vol. 57, No. 3, March 2006, pp.116, Rs. 2250.00

Many years ago, one of my students gave me a *Marg* volume titled *Of Kings and Coins*. Its sumptuous, luminous photographs were my introduction to the beauty of ancient and medieval Indian coinage. I held on to that volume and used it for many years as a teaching aid to show students the variety and aesthetic richness of numismatic sources. Over a decade later, here is another *Marg* volume on coins, this time with a special focus on coins as expressions of power and as media of communciation.

In older histories of ancient and medieval India, the distribution of a ruler's coins was seen as reflecting the contours of his kingdom and the motifs on them were considered representions of his personal religious beliefs. The metallic purity of gold and silver coins was viewed as an index of general economic prosperity and debasement was interpreted as a symptom of economic decline or financial crisis. All these notions can be questioned. Coins have to be read as multilayered texts. Size, shape, fabric, metal, motifs and legends combine to make coins communicators of several different sorts of messages. The surface area they offer is relatively small, but their advantage lies in their ability to effortlessly travel far and wide as a part of large networks of economic exchange.

H.P. Ray's Introduction draws attention to many important facets of ancient and early medieval coinage, while her second piece gives an overview of ancient Roman coins found in the Indian subcontinent. The range of types found here is different from those found within the Roman empire. The emperor's portrait was sometimes defaced and counter-marks consisting of local symbols were added on. These coins have to be contextualized within the framework of the complex networks of Indian Ocean trade. A lot of water has flown under this bridge since the 1940's when Mortimer Wheeler conjured visions of colonies of Roman traders living at Indian ports such as Arikamedu and Ray herself has made major contributions in this area of scholarship. Her overview highlights several important aspects of the evidence, but could have more sharply delineated the new conclusions flowing out of recent perspectives.

The starting point of Shailendra Bhandare's excellent analysis of the Kshaharata-Satavahana coinage is the spectacular Jogalthembi hoard. This consisted of over 13,000 coins of the Kshaharata ruler Nahapana; over 8,000 of these were counter-struck by the Satavahana king Gautamiputra Satakarni. Bhandare emphasizes the fact that counter-striking does not merely reflect political victories and defeats. In times of dynastic change, it represents a short-cut for rulers to provide an acceptable medium of exchange. The interesting continuities in motifs in the Kshatrapa and Satavahana coinage can also be understood as measures to avoid "circulatory shock" in the economy.

The relationship between the emergence of a religious practice, its codification and acceptance in texts, and representation on coins represent different stages of religious processes. Religious symbols on coins clearly have to be looked upon not just as reflections of royal beliefs but as instruments of royal policy. Rita Devi Sharma and H. P. Ray's study of the iconography of Shiva images on coins focuses on the 3rd/2nd centuries BCE to the 4th-5th centuries CE, an exceptionally fertile period in the history of religious cults. There are several fascinating examples of the metamorphosis of deities. For instance the god Oesho on Kushana coins, initially depicted as Heracles, gradually acquired Shiva's bull and his trident. Whether coins played a role in the actual spread of religious ideas, as suggested by Sharma and Ray, needs further exploration.

The stage shifts to women rulers of early medieval Kashmir in Devika Rangachari's contribution to this volume. Rangachari points out that while the twelfth century historian Kalhana treated women as "pertinent historical

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figures," the writings of modern historians have been marked by an alarming consensual bias against women's role in Indian history. Rangachari draws attention to a coin type issued by King Kshemagupta with the legend 'di-Kshemagupta,' the 'di' being an abbreviated form of Queen Didda's name. She uses the numismatic evidence as an entry point for a discussion of the important roles played by queens in Kashmir politics. This is a spirited piece, which could, however, have done with more details on the queens' coins, especially their motifs.

Syed Ejaz Hussain's study of the coinage of the medieval Indian Sultanates takes the reader deeper into the symbolic significance of coins and identifies the many different kinds of royal messages they could convey to subjects. Coins were a means of legitimizing power and the striking and presentation of new coins were important royal rituals. They could reflect royal boasts – for instance Alauddin Khilji's self-description as the second Alexander. Coins were issued to mark military victories and to commemorate occasions on which a king received tribute from subordinate rulers. Hussain mentions an interesting coin (a sort of 'thank you coin') issued by Ali Mardan Khalji (1210-14) of Bengal, which carries the name of a prison guard who once helped him escape from prison.

Muhammad bin Tughluq's radical and ill-fated introduction of a token currency is well-known. Less known are the facts that his coins are remarkable for their variety in types and legends, artistic excellence, and superb calligraphy. Sanjay Garg illustrates how coins reflect the biography of the Sultan and the history of his empire. For instance, the token currency carried the king's appeal to his subjects to accept the new money at face value, accompanied by a broad hint in the form of a Quranic verse exhorting people to obey God, the Prophet and those charged with authority among them. The transfer of the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad is also reflected in coins, but Barani's claim that not even a cat or a dog was left in Delhi is belied by the evidence of coins issued during those years from the Delhi mint. Garg makes his point well, but his assertion that coins form "the most unbiased and reliable source of history," seems somewhat exaggerated.

Najaf Haider discusses a coin issue of Akbar's time which carries the date 'alf' (millennium). He argues that these 'Alf coins' reflect the king's own philosophical quest as well as the transmission of religious and political ideas at the time. The emperor's earlier coins were dated in the Islamic ***hijri*** era, and the curious thing is that the 'alf' date started appearing on coins a good ten years before the thousand-year anniversary of that era. Taking into account Badauni's testimony, it seems that Akbar was inspired by the Nuqtawiya idea of the millennium, an idea that was probably all the more attractive because the emperor could fancy that he was the prophet who was supposed to appear in the new millenium.

In Shailendra Bhandare's 'A Metallic Mirror: Changing Representations of Sovereignty during the Raj', coins emerge as lively media through which prevailing political hierarchies could be expressed, concealed or subverted. Take the case of Ghazi ud-Din Haidar, a Nawab of Awadh in the early nineteenth century, very much under the thumb of the British, whose coins displayed a showy coat of arms in the European style, staking a hollow claim for independent status. The many fascinating examples cited by Bhandare include a coin issued by Viswanath Singh, ruler of Rewa (a British protectorate in Baghelkhand), which carried "Agent Bushby Saheb" in English on the reverse. A.G. Bushby was the then British Agent for Central India. Another gem of numismatic sychophancy was a coin issued by Vijay Bahadur Ju Deo of Datia, describing this king as 'Kampani-mitra' ('the friend of the Company'). The *piece de resistance*, however, is the legend

'Dost-i-Landhan' (Friend of London) which was emblazoned on Mewar coins from the post-Revolt years right up to 1948.

Jean-Marie Lafont highlights the enthusiasm for coin collection among French military officers associated with the court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Allard, Ventura and Court were part of a larger European community of antiquarians that cut across the imperialist rivalries of the time. That these Frenchmen had a part to play in the discovery of clues to India's ancient past cannot be denied, but Lafont's assertion that there is a tradition of deriding their role is curious. The fact is that their achievements were on the whole less significant than those of their British counterparts. And although the French and British amateur archaeologists were colourful and energetic men, there is a danger in romanticizing them too much and ignoring their limitations. Their desire to acquire ancient coins and relics often led to the destruction of the *stupas* in which such treasures were enshrined.

The final piece by Indira Rajaraman brings us to the present and to the question why coins still exist in this age of credit cards. Rajaraman suggests this is because of a deeply-held cultural value attached to coins. The many scholarly and thought-provoking articles in this book along with their beautiful photographic illustrations make it abundantly clear that coins are more than just money. They make this *Marg* volume, like its predecessor, a collector's item.■

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A Royal Chronicle

Meena Bhargava

BABUR NAMA: JOURNAL OF EMPEROR BABUR
Translated by Annette Susannah Beveridge.
Abridged, edited and introduced by Dilip Hiro
Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2006, pp. xxxiii + 385, Rs. 350.00

Babur Nama is an autobiography of Zahiruddin Muhammad Babur, the founder of the Mughal Empire in India, which he established in 1526 after defeating Sultan Ibrahim Lodi in the first battle of Panipat. More appropriately, *Babur Nama* is a memoir and a diary kept by Babur since he was ten years old until a year before his death in December 1530. Babur began chronicling events soon after he became the governor of Andijan (now in Uzbekistan) at the age of ten following the assassination of his father Omar Shaikh Mirza in 1493. Babur not only wrote daily events but also the personal and filial information about his contemporaries. He wrote himself till he stabilized himself as the Emperor in 1527, after which he dictated his memoirs. The fact that he wrote himself, or dictated what he wished to be penned down, makes *Babur Nama* a personal, coherent and a lucid chronicle.

Babur had written the chronicle in Chaghatai Turkish. Annette Susannah Beveridge (1842-1929) translated it into English[1]. The original *Babur Nama* is in two volumes and runs into 906 pages with expansive, exhaustive footnotes by Beveridge. Dilip Hiro has done a remarkable job by abridging this huge chronicle and "transforming a book of sumo wrestler proportions to those of a tennis champion" (p. xix). Needless to say, while abridging and editing it, Hiro has retained the essence and spirit of the chronicle. However, contrary to Hiro's observation that "dedicated scholars are known to shy away from perusing the book from cover to cover", I believe and recommend that for the true flavour of the chronicle, abridged version notwithstanding, the entire *Babur Nama* in both its volumes should be read.

The importance of the abridged text, nonetheless, cannot be countered. Its value has been enhanced by the three distinct maps which show the movement of Babur from Central Asia to Hindustan; the matrilineal (descendants of Chingez Khan) and patrimonial branch (from Timur Beg) of Babur's family tree and the list of individuals who played a dominant role in Babur's life. Hiro has retained the original dating by Islamic calendar, styled AH (After Hijra i.e. Migration of the Prophet). He observes that the division of the book into three parts – Fergana and Samarkand (Uzbekistan) AH 899 – AH 909 (14 February 1483-7 to July 1502); The Domain of Kabul (Afghanistan) AH 910 – AH 931 (14 JUNE 1504 to 12 December 1520); Hindustan (India and Pakistan) AH 932-5 Jumada Awal AH 937 (18 October 1525 to 12 August 1530) – has been determined by geography. I, however, think that this division is also chronologically sound and relates to the significant phases and events in the life and career of Babur.

Babur Nama is both a narrative and an analysis of the sixteenth century in Central Asia and Hindustan (including India, Pakistan and Bangladesh). Babur was a descendant of Chingez Khan from his mother's side while his father's family traced its genealogy to Timur. However, Babur apparently preferred to be known as a Timuri rather than a Chingezi or a Mongol. The chronicle brings across Babur's perceptions of politics and sovereignty, warfare and military technology, his observations on the environment, flora, fauna, climate, the monsoonal season of Hindustan and the impact it had on his plans of military expedition, his description of the buildings and architectural styles in Hindustan which he believed lacked symmetry and balance in comparison to the architecture of Central Asia, music and paintings, food and clothing of the people of Hindustan and his reflections on human conditions.

Babur pens down details, both academic and personal, with remarkable candour and ease. He reveals no inhibitions and embarrassment in expressing his homosexual inclinations or his infatuation for a teenage boy or writing about his rowdy wine and *ma'jun* (an intoxicant made with *bhang*, milk, sugar and spices) parties and music gala. It is evident from his long, winding descriptions that he hosted these parties before embarking on any military expeditions or at the end of it. On the one hand, we find unrelenting exposition of these parties and on the other hand, Babur expresses that alcohol and intoxicants were un-Islamic and contrary to Sunni Hanafi Code. He describes that being a man of principles and piety he struggled with himself on the issue of drinking wine. He had not tasted wine till the age of 29. The occasion came after his second conquest of Samarqand in 1512 and thereafter wine flowed like water in all parties. Though he renounced wine in 1527 on the eve of the battle of Khanua against Rana Sanga of Mewar, he remained addicted to *ma'jun*. From 1527 to 1530, Babur's description of *ma'jun* – how it was made, how often he consumed it and the pleasure it gave him – becomes even more elaborate and frequent.

Women are conspicuously absent in the *Babur Nama*. Although he had married several times and fathered children, he described himself as a prudish, bashful man who saw his first wife Ayisha Sultan Begum (whom he had married at the age of 16) only once in fifteen days or so. The only woman he mentions with reverence is his maternal grandmother, Aisan Daulat Begum, whom he describes as an educated, mature woman and whom he consulted on political and state matters. Otherwise, women are represented as sex objects, slave girls and organs for reproduction.

Babur was not as mundane as the history books have painted him. He was not merely an ambitious medieval ruler and a conqueror, a warrior and a political manipulator but was also very largely an environmentalist, a naturalist, a poet, a philanderer, a lover and much more. To discover the rest of Babur, read the *Babur Nama*.

However interesting and valuable the *Babur Nama* may be, Hiro is not quite justified in his suggestion that the chronicle remained unrivalled for more than five centuries and that it lost its monopoly only with the publication of a diary maintained by Queen Victoria (r. 1837-1901). Mughal Emperor Akbar dictated his memoirs to his courtier, Abul Fazl, which resulted in a voluminous, three volume *Akbar Nama* (with its appendix *Ain-i Akbari*). Emperor Jahangir is known to have written several autobiographies; of these, two popular ones could be mentioned, *Tuzuk-i Jahangiri* and *Jahangir Nama*. These memoirs and diaries have been significant and pivotal in the construction of Mughal Indian history and cannot be overlooked.■

References

1 Annette Susannah Beveridge was an astute, renowned orientalist, known for her endeavours in promoting women's education. She had come to India in 1873 to encourage education for women in Bengal and had played a significant role in the founding of *Hindu Mahila Bidyalaya* in Calcutta, which later came to be known as Bethune College. She is however more popularly known for her translations of the medieval Indian and Central Asian texts into English.

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New Poisons, Old Remedies

Mohan Rao

OLD POTIONS, NEW BOTTLES: RECASTING INDIGENOUS MEDICINE IN COLONIAL PUNJAB, 1850-1945
By Kavita Sivaramakrishnan
Orient Longman, Hyderabad, 2006, pp.280, Rs.795.00

Early liberal-paternalist – as indeed Evangelic belief – of a civilizing mission took the form of encouraging a new moral order in the Punjab based on popular education. But following 1857, a new imperial hardness entered the colonial bureaucracy. What language was to be the official medium of administrative work? Urdu seemed to be self-evident, with the establishment of the Punjab University to prepare a cadre of local administrators and to promote oriental studies in "vernacular" languages.

The late nineteenth century in Punjab, as in Bengal, witnessed huge debates about the role of "indigenous" science and "western" science – harbingers of today's concerns with "Hindu" science, mathematics and so on. Many factors went into the making of these discourses. One of course was the reaction to colonial efforts to deligitimize them as unscientific and empirical medical methods, to be distinguished from the universal, scientific and rational methods of biomedicine. The second was a product of the work of Orientalists, as some indigenous practitioners harked back to the glory of ancient "Hindu" sciences, to the arts, and indeed to their "Aryan" past, a civilization that was said to have been at its pinnacle of achievements in diverse fields. The third, which the author of the volume under review traces, is the consolidation of indigenous practitioners into professional bodies, their reinvention made possible by newly emerging business classes, a burgeoning "vernacular' press, and their recasting of Ayurveda and Unani as scientific bodies of knowledge, indigenous, and therefore authentic, pure and unsullied as was the national genius they thought they reflected and were a reflection of. In the process, "this produced representations of language-based interests…aligned with…often disparate (ideas) of a Hindu nation expressed in the vocabulary of Hindi revivalism" (p. 2).

Ayurvedic learning in early nineteenth century Punjab was of two kinds: the Brahminical schools or pathashala largely located in the larger urban centres, with a small student body that learnt in Sanskrit. The more widespread were the schools associated with Hindu heterodox sects such as the Dadupanthis and Jogis, the Jainas and the Sikh sects of Udasis and Nirmalas, who were responsible for its widespread diffusion in Gurmukhi. These sects became more prominent and powerful in the early nineteenth century as they were appointed as jagirdars and functionaries of the state under Ranjit Singh. They also provided treatment and medical relief, free of charge in Udasi akharas. Significantly, vaids practised closely with Yunani-practising hakims, who were themselves widely dispersed and attested to the influence of Arabic and Persian learning at maktabs. Many of the maktabs in Delhi and Amritsar were supported by wealthy Hindu and Sikh notables. In short, what existed appeared to be pluralistic, inclusive and non-professional bodies of practice performing a range of medical functions and indeed public health ones because some of them were also involved in vaccinations and inoculations.

Punjab's annexation in 1850 changed all that: the medicine men attached to the courts were pensioned off, land grants to support traditional intellectuals and educational institutions were withdrawn, and with the establishment of the Lahore Medical School in 1860, efforts were made to introduce medical professionals, while indigenous practitioners were initially employed in rural dispensaries and as provincial vaccination staff.

Early liberal-paternalist – as indeed Evangelic belief – of a civilizing mission took the form of encouraging a new moral order in the Punjab based on popular education. But following 1857, a new imperial hardness entered the colonial bureaucracy. What language was to be the official medium of administrative work? Urdu seemed to be self-evident, with the establishment of the Punjab University to prepare a cadre of local administrators and to promote oriental studies in "vernacular" languages. The Orientalist movement included indigenous medicine as a significant part of the Oriental College curriculum. The curriculum evolved here bore no relation to either the linguistic plurality or the medical practices that characterized the Punjab. Hindi was seen as the language for Ayurveda and the Urdu the language of Yunani, the former supplemented by Sanskrit and the latter by Persian and Arabic. In the process, Ayurveda and Yunani "were represented as embodying homogenous traditions of Hindu and Islamic learning. Their hereditary organization, the location of their medical knowledge in ancient 'religious' texts…were all viewed as a reflection of the authoritarian, custom and religion based social life that western education and colonial modernity were attempting to redress" (p.41).

As indigenous practitioners organized and fought back to reclaim social status and their livelihoods, they bought into many of the foundational myths of colonialism and created their own mythologies, their new "histories". As a publicist noted:

> History is such an influential form of knowledge that it can shape the life of communities, the progress of religion and the trajectory of learning….Reading histories of Harvey and Hunter can therefore inspire doctors to surgery just as also Athreya and Dhanvantri can evoke pride in Ayurvedic surgery" (p132).

Thus the Ayurvedic Sammelan leadership sponsored the celebration of Dhanvantri Diwas, projecting the avatar of Vishnu, Dhanvantri, as the deity of Ayurvedic practice and celebrating his birthday. The older deities of Ayurveda, the Aswins, with their origins in Persia, were quietly replaced in an act of deicide. Reconstructing a Hindu scientific tradition from the published writings of Orientalists like Willam Jones and Forbes Royle, they also recounted the histories of Hindu science written by Indian scientists. Thus Jagdish Chandra Bose's work and Prafulla Chandra Ray's *History of Hindu Chemistry* were invoked to claim that Ayurveda went back to vedic science. It was argued that the eight parts of Ayurveda, compiled by Sushruta, Charaka and Vaghbatta, included anatomy, physiology, therapeutics, surgery, midwifery and so on, and were a "theoretically complete and rationally evolved medical system" (p.133). At the same time as they laid claim to a universal science, distanced themselves from quacks, faith-healers, and those who continue to practice family-based hereditary medicine. Coming from the newly emerging commercial classes as Punjab was increasingly integrated into the global market, many members of these new corporate bodies also started pharmacies, that were advertised in various tracts and publications that they sponsored. The plague epidemic – fracturing old social lines – also gave the indigenous practitioners new claims to relevance, as western medicine was seen to be equally, tragically, ineffectual.

The consolidation of the monolithic Ayurvedic tradition was also helped by attacks on the Punjab government's grant of funds to support Ayurveda in the DAV College and Yunani in the Tibbia colleges in 1928. IMS officers argued that this funding was misplaced, as Ayurveda, and indeed all indigenous systems of medicine, were a baggage of superstition practised by quacks. In the furious controversy this generated Lala Lajpat Rai argued in an editorial "Why is the destruction of Dr.Dodo (the quack) a domestic question for Vaids and hakims only? Are there no Dodos among the

allopathic practitioners? In my life, I have come across hundreds of them. There are Dodos enough even among those who occupy high positions under government. Indian Dodos are called pansaris, European Dodos are called doctors...The former live on their wits, the latter on the Indian tax payer" (p.137). Thus nationalistic pride, indeed "racial" pride and the issue of patronage were linked together, completely obscuring other perhaps more salient issues, issues of efficacy, access and of public health. The recent fracas over Acharya Ramdev's "Ayurvedic" preparations – and the government's failure to act in public interest – show how familiar these anxieties can be. As the author trenchantly notes, this also obscured the fact that "there was no pristine Ayurveda....due to the wide use of drugs like quinine, as well as other forms of western medical therapies by practitioners of Ayurveda. Further news and exchanges (indeed facilitated by many of the Ayurvedic journals themselves) were already altering the way vaids diagnosed and treated disease. Western medical practitioners were known to be invited to sammelans or Vaid-Tibb committee meetings" (p.139). Yet Ayurveda in particular acquired a new canonical orthodoxy in its claim to science and to state patronage. In the process, the pluralistic practice of medicine was fractured along communal lines, new poisons steeped into old remedies.

All this when life expectations at birth stood at 22 years, when the Death Rate was around 25, when the Infant Mortality Rate was close to 200 per thousand live births and the Maternal Mortality Rate was about 20 per thousand live births, and when malaria took a toll of about 4 million deaths a year. Clearly, these debates had little to do with public health in the country.

Meticulously researched – utilizing an impressively wide array of data sources, from official records to pamphlets and journals to interviews – the book should be of interest to scholars in history, public health and indeed regional studies. This is old, hard, and in these days of poststructural analysis, welcome history.

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Beyond a 'Sanitized' History

Rajib Dasgupta

EXPUNGING VARIOLA: THE CONTROL AND ERADICATION OF SMALLPOX IN INDIA 1947-77
By Sanjoy Bhattacharya
Orient Longman, New Delhi, 2006, pp. xv+327, Rs. 750.00

This book is an outcome of a research project of the Wellcome Trust History of Medicine awarded to Professor Michael Worboys and Dr. Mark Harrison in which the author was a key researcher. Smallpox eradication (National Smallpox Eradication Programme—NSEP, is showcased and taught as a textbook case of disease eradication; it has fuelled aspirations for eradication of more communicable diseases, the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) being the current one. The author explores and elucidates numerous behind-the-scene events and processes of the smallpox eradication and this book is a sequel to the earlier volume *Fractured States: Smallpox, Public Health and Vaccination Policy in British India, 1800-1947.* This volume deals with the next (and final) stage spanning from 1947 to 1977.

There are several publications by public health personnel who have been associated with the eradication programme that have generally dealt with the more technical aspects dubbed as "sanitised descriptions" by the author. This volume has gone beyond that framework of official history that have by and large documented the last phase. A far broader perspective has been adopted dealing with a wide range of factors and processes. This treatise on "nuanced history" of the eradication programme has been reconstructed by accessing a large cache of previously unanalysed archival material and private papers; these have been further enriched with interviews with several public health stalwarts who held key positions in the programme. It has examined the evolution of health services and immunization policies across the three decades, particularly, in the aftermath of Independence and Partition when the nascent state was carving out its own policy with a strong welfarist approach. What has been elucidated excellently are the multiple strands in the decision making processes both at central and state levels with international and resource considerations in the background.

It traces the history of the programme in three phases – that of programme formulation and design (1947-59), expansion of the programme across a large country with heterogeneous conditions (1960-68) and the final phase (1969-77). Across all the three phases, a consistent methodology has been adopted drawing upon archival and published material. The author has fascinatingly demonstrated that a programme is not a monolithic and straitjacketed structure but is an organized complexity which is a heady cocktail of policy initiatives and implementation strategies with individual perceptions and considerations (of key players) playing significant roles in giving a strategy a final operational shape. The volume has documented disagreements of policy at central, state and district levels and competition between different departments often impeding or preventing the implementation of certain decisions. Significantly, this year's focus of the WHO is on health personnel; the author has dwelt at length on the conditions and aspirations of the vaccinators who played a pivotal role in vaccination and surveillance that finally paved the way for eradication. The unionization of vaccination cadres pitched them against various levels of the government and not always did it benefit the programme; this has important lessons for the contemporary public health administrators at a time when on account of health sector reforms there is gross shortage of personnel and outsourcing and casualization are on the rise.

Though it is common knowledge that the WHO played a key role in the programme the author has explored the finer nuances in depth. Alongside the programme, the WHO's involvement with the organization of health services has received due attention. One of the most exciting aspects of the volume is the documentation of the conflicts and crises within the WHO personnel and foreign experts. A rich trove of archival material has been used from WHO records – both at regional and HQ levels. Just as there had been multiple strands within different levels of the Indian state, history seemed to be repeating itself within the WHO establishment. The conflicts and cooperation between WHO experts and key Indian players have been skilfully documented. Another crisis (largely ignored in the 'official' biographies of the programme) that has been given due recognition is the uncertainties associated with the technology at various points in history (mostly during the 1950s). To persuade large numbers of rural (and urban) population to undergo mass vaccination and repeated rounds of surveillance met with significant obstacles. Added to these were experiences of people when individuals suffered from post-vaccinal infections and their understandable reluctance to subject them to a technology that could be potentially harmful (in addition to the injections being extremely painful with the earlier generations of vaccines). The government organized "annual shows" to popularize the programme and publicize less painful functions that would be termed today as social mobilization.

The political economy analysis of the programme is perhaps best exemplified in the section where the author explores the interactions of the WHO managers with the Indian state in the last phase of NSEP. This was at a time (during the mid-1970s) when the NSEP had entered a critical phase and critical support was required from the Prime Minister (Indira Gandhi) and Chief Ministers to give it 'the final push' (to borrow the slogan from the polio campaign). Their interlocutions with the WHO managers and efforts at pushing the central/state health administrators led to "short lived" results. This was also at a time that there was intense competition

among vertical programmes with the Family Planning Programme being a pet project and obsession with Sanjay Gandhi. Intricate negotiations and advocacy by WHO chiefs (Henderson at the international level and Grasset at the national level) with the Prime Minister was able to extract the commitment of the Indian state in the last lap of the NSEP. J.R.D. Tata also played a significant role in these negotiations. It is no coincidence perhaps that the final eradication (with military style surveillance and restrictions of movement of human populations) was achieved at a time when national Emergency was in force (1975-77) with considerable suspension of civil rights and liberties. 23 April, 1977 is still remembered with pride when international certification was awarded for smallpox eradication to India particularly when Indian officials and experts had termed the programme as "an impossible task" and "a misguided adventure". There were tensions galore throughout the programme including numerous instances of corruption at various levels.

The smallpox eradication programme (and its success despite the tortuous paths elucidated in this book) has created stereotypes for disease eradication amply demonstrated in the GPEI. This book a must-read for medical historians and public health scientists. It has great contemporary significance given the uncertainties that the polio eradication project has entered despite unprecedented commitment of resources; there are lessons to be learnt about programmes but questions need to be raised about whether eradication is a philosophy to be doggedly pursued at such tremendous costs.■

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Book News Book News

Opening Scene: Early Memoirs of a Dramatist & A Play by Adya Rangacharya, translated by Shashi Deshpande records without pomp or sentiment the genesis of a brilliant Kannada dramatist. Creative writer and critic, Shriranga as he came to be known penned a vast body of scholarly treatises on subjects ranging from drama to philosophy and philology, and his translation of the *Natyashastra* remains the definitive source of reference for students of theatre.
Penguin, Delhi, 2006, pp. 185, Rs. 200.00

Passion India: The Study of The Spanish Princess of Kapurthala by Javier Moro, and translated by Peter J. Hearn, is the fascinating story of the wedding of the Spanish girl, Anita Delgado, to the incredibly wealthy Maharajah of Kapurthala, and the subsequent love and betrayal culminating in one of the biggest scandals ever to rock colonial society in British India. Soon to be made into a film, this bestseller renders exotically the flavour of a time and the colours and smells of India.
Full Circle, Delhi, 2006, pp. 448, Rs. 295.00

Blind Faith by Sagarika Ghose, a fragile, delicately wrought parable on the limitations of vision and the dark side of love. The novel spans London and India, the world of suave corporates and the Kumbh Mela and tells the tale of a duplicitous love and journey in which the protagonist Mia learns that life allows another perspective of reason that blind, of hate that liberates and of love that strangles.
HarperCollins with The India Today Group, 2006, pp. 273, Rs. 295.00

Concerns Beyond Targets

Rama Baru

LOOKING BACK LOOKING FORWARD:
A PROFILE OF SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH IN INDIA
Edited by Shireen J. Jejeebhoy
Population Council and Rawat Publications, New Delhi, 2004, pp. 240, Rs. 450.00

Reproductive and Child Health Programme was seen as a radical departure from the 'target oriented' family planning programme after the ICPD conference in Cairo. This programme was seen to be a more comprehensive approach that included sexual and reproductive health concerns.

The book under review draws together articles that have examined various aspects that are included under the rubric of RCH viz. contraceptive use, maternal health and progressing related care, abortion, reproductive tract injections and STIs; young people's sexual and reproductive health; infertility and domestic violence. Based on an analysis of available data and published studies these articles examine the status of the various aspects of the programme.

Despite the political and financial backing to the programme there are a number of gaps that are discernible. K.G. Santhya's article clearly shows that there is a huge unmet need as far as contraceptive use is concerned which is largely due to limited access, availability and of quality general health services. Jejeebhoy and Varkey's article highlights the trends in maternal mortality, the regional variations it presents and the differential access to health services. As they point there are a number of 'risk factors' that seem to influence outcomes and these include poor socio-economic conditions, high prevalence of anaemia, inadequacy of the programme and shortcomings in health services delivery. They also identify research gaps in this area that need further exploitation.

Anjali Widge's article on infertility is exploring an area that is often neglected since the programme has largely been informed by 'fertility control' rather than reproductive problems faced by women. Although the proportion of women suffering from infertility may be small it is estimated that around 6 percent of women in the ever-married age group are childless, the social and psychological pressures that they have to endure is tremendous. The treatment seeking, the responsiveness of the health services and the growth of assisted reproductive technologies that is largely in the commercial sector creates its own pressures at the emotional, social and economic levels.

Domestic violence and its consequences for women's health has gained attention. A number of surveys have been carried out by International Research Organisation, National Surveys and NGOs. Vijaya Nidadavolu examines available data to study the prevalence, the socio-demographic characteristics and its consequences for both physical and mental health. The available evidence on domestic violence is spare and underestimated since it is a sensitive issue for women. The response from legal, health and social welfare agencies has been wanting.

Jejeebhoy and Sebastian examine young people's sexual and reproductive health, which covers the vulnerable period of adolescence and early adulthood. Often there is inadequate information regarding sexuality, which has serious consequences for physical and mental health among the youth.

The book also provides an extensive bibliography that is extremely useful for anyone who wants to pursue research in this area. I think this book would be valuable for students, researches and policy makers.■

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Fragmentary History of Reproductive Health

Krishna Soman

REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH IN INDIA: HISTORY, POLITICS, CONTROVERSIES
Edited by Sarah Hodges
Orient Longman, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 264+ix, Rs. 620.00

The book under review is an outcome of a conference on " Population, Birth Control and Reproductive Health in Late Colonial India", held at the Centre for the History and Culture of Medicine, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. It is also one in the series of New Perspectives in South Asian History.

This academic book under review is topical at the beginning of the 21st century when politics and controversies continue to shape and redefine notions of reproduction and reproductive health in the context of women's lives in changing societies. The volume — for its title – will certainly draw the attention of a wide range of scholars engaged in not only social science inquiries in the history of medicine but also public health, women's right to health among other areas of interest. The extent to which it fulfills their expectations, however, will be told by concerned readers in time. Edited by Sara Hodges, the volume presents a collection of essays from eight established scholars reflecting on the history, politics and controversies of 'reproductive health' in India. The introduction 'Towards a History of Reproduction' offers a canvas for display of the individual essays. The essays cover almost a century spanning broadly between 1850 and 1950. According to the editor, this is the period that reflects on 'modern India'. Besides essays by individual scholars, the volume also presents an archival document as reference. Squarely, the essays can be clubbed into three broad categories dealing with institutional histories in India, histories of the affected stratified Indian society and simultaneous debates on birth control in the global sphere.

Based on the official medical work and writings in early 20 century India, David Arnold, in his piece on official attitudes to population, birth control and reproductive health , interprets that women's reproductive health at that time was a low priority on the state's agenda. Rather, it was propagation of birth control that received much importance as this was considered as a practical way of curbing population growth. Colonial medical officers however, did not blindly support this attitude of their administrative counterparts. Though the Bhore committee had later emphasized better health care for women, birth control was seldom considered as a means to improve their health. During the period under observation, while presence of women doctors in medical services was noticeable, there was no consensus among them on propagation and promotion of birth control measures.

In another essay, Barbara Ramusack finds that the attitudes of women physicians towards birth control reflected similar contradictions and ambivalence; whereas, Maneesha Lal lays down interestingly, how the discourses on purdah system in the late 19 century was seen as a threat to women's health. She observes that while the threat continued to prevail in medical knowledge, understanding of the relationship between the 'purdah' system and 'pathology' among women itself had changed with time. For instance, earlier in the late 19 century, the purdah system was viewed as an obstruction to women's access to health care, while later in early 1920s it was considered as a cause of women's illness. Sarah Hodges, in her essay dealing with Indian eugenics and reforms discusses the centrality of eugenics to social reform in India and along with Maneesha Lal's essay raises the issue of how such anxieties about health and 'reproduction' shaped agendas for 'women's health'.

This academic book under review is topical at the beginning of the 21st century when politics and controversies continue to shape and redefine notions of reproduction and reproductive health in the context of women's lives in changing societies.

In the following part of the volume, essays by Charu Gupta, Supriya Guha and Anshu Malhotra investigate differential implications of the major drives by the colonial state on population and birth control for the stratified Indian society under colonial rule. For instance in the north Indian context, Charu Gupta finds that the early 20th century politics of population had gender, caste and communal implications. In contrast, Supriya Guha reveals how successfully the colonial emphasis on 'hygiene ' had penetrated the urban middle class Bengali culture. This was marked by popularization and demand for hygienic home births. Anshu Malhotra, in turn, finds that introduction of apparently new midwifery practices became a tool for the emerging middle classes as upper caste elites of colonial Punjab in shaping their identity through replication of the colonial state's attack on the 'native' or 'low caste' dais as backward, dangerous and menacing.

The volume is concluded with a focus on the debate on birth control in global agenda. Anna Aryee introduces the debate between Mahatma Gandhi and Margaret Sanger of the American lobby group. This essay is supplemented by the archival document of 1936.

Sarah Hodges' introduction points out that the volume deals with the 'history of reproduction', which is a way of framing history of institutions, discourses and practices around 'women's reproductive health' that surfaced on the agenda of social reform, medical sciences and colonial public health among others.

It is interesting to observe the continuities and discontinuities of certain issues raised in Sarah's introduction and other essays as well. For instance, the institution of *'dai'* - a culturally rooted resource pool of local women for managing child birth, continues to be threatened by contemporary medical knowledge, powerful lobbies and their influences on the state in various accounts. 'Safe motherhood' gatherings in the present time often reproduce identical threats.

Similarly, women's health continues to be a low priority on the state's agenda, while the importance and horizon of 'reproductive health' has moved beyond it's earlier concern for child birth. Another sign of continuity however, is that the state's agenda of 'women's reproductive health' fails to take cognizance of the fact that women's health is an outcome of their social existence. It overlooks the social existence that embraces their roles in not only biological but also social reproduction.

Some of the wider aspects of women's lives and their multiple roles in production and reproduction or in biological and social reproduction were emphasized by the National Planning Committee in 1938. In presence of supportive literature in these areas, Sarah deals with women's 'reproduction' or 'reproductive health' in isolation. Against this gap, the introduction of the book struggles to tune into its catchy title.

According to Sarah Hodges, 'history of reproduction' is told by the time and concerns captured by terms like 'procreation', 'maternal welfare', 'parturition', and 'reproductive health' and similar others. From this and her subsequent engagements with terms such as 'reproduction', 'reproductive health', 'women's health', it is evident that she deals with biological reproduction and histories of institutions, discourses and practices around it. Statement such as 'reproduction is always simultaneously a physiological as well as social act' (p.2) subsequently reflects on a narrow view of 'social act'.

Finally, the readers who are rooted in contemporary discourses on women's reproductive health and want to learn from history, need to go back and forth in order to understand the rhetoric of 'women's reproductive health' used in interpreting the history of biological reproduction in the late 19 and early 20 centuries in India. This is rather a fragmentary history of reproductive health in India.■

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A Forgotten Heroine

Iqbal Akhund

SPY PRINCESS: THE LIFE OF NOOR INAYAT KHAN
By Shrabani Basu
Lotus Roli, Delhi, 2006, pp.234, Rs.395.00

In an appendix to the book there is a list of Indian members of the army of the Raj who won the Victoria Cross in WW II. Among them:

Havildar Major Chhelu Ram, 6th Rajputana Rifles at Jebel Garci in Tunisia:

'ran through enemy fire armed only with a tommy gun and tin helmet, killing all occupants of the machine gun post. Also attended to an officer in an exposed position though himself seriously wounded. Died on the field.'

Naik Fazal Din, 10th Baluch regiment in Meiktila, Burma:

'was speared by an officer's sword but tore sword out of his back and killed Japanese with it. Continued to help his colleagues and killed two more Japanese with the same sword. Then waved the sword, rallying his men, who were so inspired they annihilated the garrison of 55 Japanese. He died soon afterwards'.

Rifleman Thaman Gurung, 5th Royal Gurkha Rifles in Monte San Bartolo, Italy:

'stood in full view of the enemy and opened fire, allowing his platoon to withdraw without further loss'.

These men were professional soldiers, they were in the army for a living, in many cases they had done so from father to son for generations. It mattered little to them to fight in far corners of the world, in wars that were not their own, swearing loyalty to a foreign King at the same time as their countrymen were engaged in a struggle against the rule of that king? What inspired such fighting spirit, disregard of danger, sacrifice of life? Simple adrenaline? A heritage of military service? Glory and Honour?

The case of Noor Inayat Khan presents a greater paradox. She was 'a mix of Indian, English, French and American' blood and culture and had only briefly visited India. Yet she had inherited strong nationalist sentiments and was forthright about it at her job interview: she would be loyal the British Crown during the war but when the war was over she might support India against Britain in the fight for independence.'

Her motive was 'idealism' – hatred of what the Nazis stood for and what they were doing. She had joined WAAF (Womens' Auxiliary Air Force) but according to one of her British instructors, she was 'longing to do something more active in the prosecution of the war, something that makes more call on her capabilities, and perhaps demands more sacrifice.' So she transferred to the Special Operations Executive, an oufit that certainly offered great opportunity for sacrifice. SOE organized, supported, supplied, resistance groups in Occupied France. The Gestapo were on the look-out for SOE agents and anyone caught was summarily dealt with. Noor's job was to be wireless operator for these groups, to send messages in code to London on what was being done, requests for supplies, to receive instructions and so forth. The Germans listened to these emissions and could trace where they were coming from. The wireless operator's position was a particularly dangerous one and to avoid being caught he or she had to be on the move all the time. The risks and dangers of the work were explained and graphically demonstrated to her and she was put through a rigorous training course. Her chief instructor and others found her to be temperamentally and in other ways unsuitable for facing these risks and dangers. Spies ought to be inconspicuous, able to go about their business unnoticed. But Noor, in the words of one instructor, was far too conspicuous 'a splendid, vague, dreamy creature …twice-seen never

When Noor sent a 'bluff' security code that was intended to signal trouble, London ignored it as 'probably a mistake'. It goes to show that the elaborate projects of even the most sophisticated, well-organized and richly-funded intelligence service can so easily be derailed by human error, complacency or laziness – not to mention treachery and betrayal.

forgotten'. But others disagreed and considered that with her familiarity with the French language and culture, she was just the person for the job. She herself had no doubts or fears and asserted that she 'was the proper person for the job.'

So she was flown to France in a hedge-hopping Lysander plane and dropped in a moonlit field. She set to work almost immediately and impressed London with her application and efficiency. But it was not long before problems began to crop up and within weeks disaster struck.

In preparing agents for working in France SOE paid meticulous attention to the smallest detail. Thus Noor was pulled up for pouring milk first into her tea-cup, a sure give-away as only the English do this. Before she climbed aboard the plane taking her to France, her pockets were searched to make sure they contained no English coins, underground ticket stubs, anything else that would give away where she had come from. Yet a French Canadian was sent in to pass himself off as a Frenchman and was immediately found out on account of his very distinctive accent. When Noor sent a 'bluff' security code that was intended to signal trouble, London ignored it as 'probably a mistake'. It goes to show that the elaborate projects of even the most sophisticated, well-organized and richly-funded intelligence service can so easily be derailed by human error, complacency or laziness – not to mention treachery and betrayal. Indeed, Noor's problems had begun the moment her plane landed in France, for the man who received the plane on behalf of the resistance network was discovered later to be a double agent. These elements combined to send Noor to Gestapo's prison, torture and eventually death. Her treatment at the hands of the Nazis was vindictive in the extreme and she was subjected to abuse and violence until the very moment that a bullet to the head ended her life. But she did not flinch, never gave in, never betrayed her trust.

Noor's was not the bravery of a soldier in the heat of battle. It was the courage of cold fortitude, in the service of a cause that she had made her own, of loyalty to colleagues, though she had been betrayed by one; perhaps also it came from the knowledge that she was the great-great-granddaughter of Tipu Sultan.

The story has been told before in books and articles in newspapers and magazines. A recent book by a French writer who worked with her in the resistance has told it in a fictionalized form under the title *The Forgotten Princess*. The standard biography is the one written by her friend, Jean Overton Fuller from which the author of the present work derived some of its material. It is indeed a story worth retelling and in *The Spy Princess* Shrabani Basu has done so in an admirable manner. With relatively little new material and writing in plain words, she makes her forgotten heroine come alive. She has written a biography that has the fluency of a good novel, a book hard to put down, a thrilling tale that is waiting to be turned into a film – an opportunity for Bollywood to take a break from its song and dance routines!

Iqbal Akhund retired Pakistani ambassador has authored two books *Memoirs of a Bystander* and *Trial and Error. The Advent and Eclipse of Benazir Bhutto* both published by the Oxford University Press.

Of Segmented Lives

Sajni Mukherji

DAUGHTERS OF THE EMPIRE: A MEMOIR OF LIFE AND TIMES IN THE BRITISH RAJ
By Iris Macfarlane
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006, pp.165, Rs.450.00

The history of British women during the Raj seems to be in the process of arrival. OUP cites three other such books on the back cover of this one and we remember Ketaki Kushari Dyson's *A Various Universe* that came out some years ago.

Macfarlane's book evolves from rereading family records, particularly letters and photographs that set up a history of four generations of Jones women in the subcontinent, concluding with her own. The "I" of her narrative is a privileged insider in it because she has the advantage of a thirty-year perspective denied to her forebears, since she wrote the work after she revisited independent India in the nineties. The earlier generations have to depend on her ironic asides to add credibility to their vacuous lives in India. Many of these are witty and acerbic and make for good reading. Her own memories with a latter-day realization of the futility of such lives aspires to be many things: it is a memoir in the simplest sense of that term, but also uses Memory (with some qualities of modern day anthropology thrown in for good measure), is an ethnography, a record of collective guilt and expiation, an imaginative journey (sometimes admittedly fictive), with or without an arrival. There are even scenes towards the beginning and end of her narration that seem to have been strongly influenced by Forster's dictum to 'Only connect' on the one hand and the brilliant non-happening at the Marabar caves in *A Passage to India* on the other.

Many years ago when I was researching into Charles Dickens, particularly into his autocratically edited journal *Household Words*, I had listed many ses to which the empire was put in its heyday. Carlyle had described the ocess as one which consigned large numbers of people to 'the dustbin of pire'. It was predominantly a white man's world. White women came to it only marginally as wives of Empire-builders, soldiers, or missionaries and appear generally to have led a shadowy humdrum existence that is not the stuff of epic narration. Other than the memsahibs, a 'poor white' group were camp followers who satisfied the sexual cravings of men in the cantonment towns and came under the purview of some of the earliest manifestations of the notorious Contagious Diseases Acts of the 1860s. It is only in recent times that such histories have been retrieved and given the attention they deserve.

Even in the male world of the nineteenth century however, in one event, the fraught moment of 1857, British women were represented by the national press in England as having performed a heroic role. The newspapers of London were full of the heroic exploits of English women beleaguered by a mass of revolting sepoys: 'the massacre at Cawnpore' and 'the siege of Lucknow' had become the stuff of legend and myth before the year was out. I have written elsewhere of the hysteria and ferocity of the news reports on and reactions to this event. Dickens himself had made jingoist references in speech after speech and letter after letter to the stories of rape and pillage on the part of the sepoys and the bravery of English women on theirs. One written to Angela Burdett Coutts, his rich patron and friend goes:

> And I wish I were Commander in Chief in India. The first thing I would do to strike that Oriental race with amazement (not in the least regarding them as if they lived in the Strand, London, or at Camden Town) should be to proclaim to them, in their language that I considered my holding that appointment by the leave of God, to mean that I should do my utmost to exterminate the Race upon whom the stain of the last cruelties rested, and that I begged them to do me the favour to observe that I was there for that purpose and no other, and was proceeding, with all convenient dispatch and merciful swiftness of execution, to blot it out of mankind and raze it off the face of the earth. (October, 1857)

By the end of the year he was planning a Christmas story about it, but curiously shying away from using India as its locale. A letter to Henry Morley shows him scouting around for an alternative setting. A silver mine in South America, perhaps? "Or can you suggest from your remembrance any more possible set of circumstances in which a few English people – gentlemen, ladies and children – and a few English soldiers, would find themselves alone in a strange wild place and liable to hostile attack? I wish to avoid India itself; but I want to shadow out in what I do the bravery of our ladies in India."

The result was the strangely dull *The Perils of Certain English Prisoners*, a tale written in collaboration with Wilkie Collins. His own son, a soldier in India had died during the year, not boldly defending the brave women and children of England but of a stomach ailment in Calcutta. A grave in the Park Street cemetery stands witness to this event.

It is to Macfarlane's credit that she understands the varied interpretational positions possible on that event – Sepoy Mutiny or First Indian War of Independence, depending on which side of an imaginary 'hanumanrekha' you belong. The war had taken place during her great-grandmother's sojourn in India and memories of that period that she records have little to do with the actual uprising.

Susan Bayly's preface tells the putative reader how to read such a narrative: Iris herself, a Plain Jane with a polio leg, was programmed to continue the tradition of the lovely Jones women through unwelcome periods with unwilling relatives, at unpleasant schools and even a finishing school where specific skills for wives of empire builders were acquired. She was not permitted to avail herself of a scholarship to Oxford (indeed not even told until much later that she had ever been offered one). She clearly had the intellectual acumen and benefit of hindsight to realize the emptiness of the life chosen for her that her predecessors did not. She tried sporadically to resist the 'cruelly' enforced separations from husband and family. She deplored too the segregation from the natives which was *de rigueur* for the wives, mothers and daughters of empire, fed as they were on the terror of the 'fearful carnalities and physical menaces of the Orient'. On at least two occasions she tried to 'connect', though understandably with limited success. This was done on one occasion through the attempt to start a school in the tea garden where she was a planter's wife, in spite of the cynicism with which this enterprise was viewed by her husband and his bosses, and later, prior to her nervous breakdown when she visited a holy man in Assam. As Bayly points out, the recollections of the women in India, via snapshots or written records, recreate the subcontinent as 'little more than a shadowy backdrop to the routines of the club and bungalow', of 'domestic gardens in tropical settings'. These women responded to India according to Bayly as 'a vegetative and animal entity rather than a colonized human space, even though the human cost of what they did was a matter of deadly seriousness for those who lived those segmented and imperceptive lives of empire.' Macfarlane's account of her own colonial life purports to be somewhat different. She recognizes its dullness and its restrictive isolation for what they were. The cocoon of privilege is a protected but claustrophobic space.

Bayly starts off her preface with a salutation to such women from Macfarlane's son Alan Macfarlane, Anthroplogy don at Cambridge: "It was an extraordinary moment in history, when a small band of middle class ladies held together the greatest Empire on earth, to their private cost and pain." Like Forster's *A Passage to India* I imagine Iris Macfarlane's target audience is English, rather than Indian, though in our universal sisterhood we must, even as Indian women, recognize some of the sorrow and pain of Englishwomen in this role. And to be fair, one has to admit that the engaging narration studiously avoids the meretricious colours of Raj reportage: the maharajahs, the banquets, the elephants and the loyal khidmatgaars.■

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To Experience and Record

Shobhabna Bhattacharji

LITERATURE OF TRAVEL AND EXPLORATION: AN ENCYCLOPEDIA
Edited by Jennifer Speake
Fitzroy Dearborn, an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, New York, 2003, 3 volumes, £90

VIEWING THE ISLAMIC ORIENT: BRITISH TRAVEL WRITERS OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
By Pallavi Pandit Laisram
Routledge, New Delhi, 2006, pp.xi+253, Rs.595.00

These delicious volumes are just the thing to have when marooned on an island for about fifteen months. They cover an enormous range of topics—travel, travel writers, modes of travel, guidebooks, imaginary journeys, tourism, pilgrimage, places travelled to, each extended in unexpected directions. Under *Borneo*, for instance, we learn that Sinbad the sailor made landfall on Borneo. Ibn Battuta wrote of it; so did Marco Polo, who refers to the profitable junk traffic between China and Borneo; Magellan's fleet visited the port-capital of Bruni in 1521; Antonio Pigafetta referred to its pearls as big as hens' eggs; the Dutch and English East India Companies sent its spices to Europe; and in the 19th century, its flora and fauna were mapped by professional scientists, among them Alfred Russel Wallace, who, but for a shipping accident, would have been the man whom we associate with the theory of evolution. The *Encyclopaedia* maintains that scientific enquiry rather than Sinbadian romance or commerce remained the official motive for travel to Borneo, but it also records the slaughter of its animals and people, and how it generated "lurid travel literature" initiated by the Norwegian naturalist and explorer Carl Bock's *The Head-Hunters of Borneo* (1881). It must have been very popular for even Richmal Crompton's William Brown once made the neighbourhood children pay to hear a snoring aunt who, he said, was *the* wild woman of Borneo.

We learn about Borneo as viewed by travellers rather than in the style of, say, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. That is the perspective of all the entries, each followed by suggestions for further reading. The lack of consistency in these lists is as much fun as visiting strange lands. Borneo's list is a page and a half long in small type and double columns; the Hungarian explorer, Indologist, archaeologist, and naturalized Indian Aurel Stein's is much shorter; and the one for steamships even shorter (it ends tantalizingly with "Waugh, Evelyn, *A Handful of Dust*, 1934"). Eric Newby, most famous for his *A Short Walk in the Hindukush* but who has also written of the "rag trade," the garment industry where he earned a living before becoming famous as a travel writer, is honoured with one that consists solely of his own writings. Go to www.routledge-ny.com/travellit for more on these suggested readings.

Historians have used travellers' tales as source material long before literary studies began to appropriate them, a belatedness that has characterized literary studies of the last thirty years at least. The link between travel and history is very clear in the entry for Byzantium. Entries for countries are sometimes organized according to geography, others break off at a historically significant date, such as 1453 for Byzantium, after which it was known as Istanbul. Byzantium is treated not as a place but a term whose history is unravelled. It was the name of a town founded, according to myth, by Byzas, son of Poseidon. In 330, the Roman Emperor Constantine named it Nova Roma Constantinopolitana (Constantine's New Rome), from which came "Constantinople" although it was more usually simply called "the city." Istanbul is an adulteration of the Greek *stin polis* (in, or to, the city). This information is followed by a history of the city from the sack of Rome in the fifth century to the 1453 sack of Constantinople by the Ottoman Turks, and of the city's symbolic importance to the Byzantine Empire. Standing at the crossroads of Asia and Europe, it became a meeting point for the Greek and Roman worlds, Christianity and Islam, and – in the words of the encyclopaedia—"civilization and barbarism." In other words, Byzantium is seen as the goal of journeys as well as en route to elsewhere, a centre of mobility for individuals, diplomats, and armies, especially the armies of the Crusades. The entry, being restricted to the city's existence as *Byzantium* and its end in 1453, is sharp and focussed. That, in fact is the pleasing style of these volumes.

We learn that in the Renaissance, when the "great geographical discoveries" began, Renaissance humanists laid down rules about the correct way to travel that are followed till today, and how they conceived of space and displacement within space which is still the accepted way of looking at travel. Sometimes, one comes across a troublingly claustrophobic approach to the travel and travel writing:

> The need to travel follows from the scattering of truth throughout the world. The humanist method is a metaphysics of movement, an ontology according to which it is only through spatial displacement that one has access to Being. It is a response to the catastrophe of Babel: the world divided . . . (p.1193).

One feels that the editor has assumed that there is only one approach (European, white, by and large Christian) to understanding the world. But to be fair, it is also one of the ways in which the *Encyclopaedia's* material, which constantly threatens to skitter off every which way leaving us breathless and uninformed, has been organized. For that very reason, its avowed organising principle — the excitement of travel, and communicating the wonder to readers — comes shining through. The epigraph from Marco Polo captures the idea:

> Perceiving that the Great Khan took pleasure in hearing accounts of whatever was new to him respecting the customs and manners of people and the peculiar circumstances of distant countries, he endeavoured wherever he went to obtain correct information on these subjects and made notes of all he saw and heard, in order to gratify the curiosity of his master.

I found myself saying irritatingly that in these volumes X or Y is "seen as" this or that, but it's the first formulation that comes to mind because a great deal of what has been categorized in other ways has been swept up into this newest Abraham's bosom, which could be a problem. A tight frame clarifies the focus of a text whereas widening the scope to include everything creates a mist. The purpose of this *Encyclopaedia*, however, is "to provide some waymarks" in the bewildering landscape of travel writing. Thanks to its crisp style, there is minimal diffusion as it encourages one to look at old things in new ways. Its ambitious scope extends from Herodotus to space exploration, but of its many categories, the two largest are of places and individuals. The entries for places are surveys of countries, regions, cities, routes, and other features, with overviews of how a place has been experienced and presented by different writers (e.g., Cairo, India).

Articles on individuals focus on significant travel writers, chiefly though not solely those who wrote in English. Disparate texts are placed in physical and historical contexts but the focus is always on how significant these places have been for travellers (Borneo, Byzantium). The captivating smaller categories include modes of transport, theorization of travel writing, travel guides, fictional travel, publishers of travel writing, notably John Murray of England, the firm that became rich by publishing the poet Byron's first long poem, the travelogue called *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. The greatest delight is to open the volumes at random and feast upon them, but in case one has a specific search in mind, the information has also been listed geographically and thematically.

One of the major problems about writing about travel writing is that after one has said that this person went to that place and wrote about it, what else is there to say? For students of literature (in the most early- to middle-20th century sense of literature) there's no further excitement. The study of travel literature can degenerate very quickly into a cynical/clinical been-there-done-that affair, to recover from which one returns to travellers'

These delicious volumes are just the thing to have when marooned on an island for about fifteen months. They cover an enormous range of topics—travel, travel writers, modes of travel, guidebooks, imaginary journeys, tourism, pilgrimage, places travelled to, each extended in unexpected directions.

accounts. There is no substitute for the detail of their records. Reginald Heber, first Lord Bishop (the title amused and appalled him) of the See of Calcutta, which then stretched from Australia to Afghanistan, toured North India in 1822 via boat and mule to consecrate the garrison church at Meerut (St.John's, where my in-laws still worship). In his journal he tells of how food was cooked on the boat every evening, of how Muslims and Hindus worked together all day and cooked separately in the evening, of arriving at military camps to hold Sunday service for which officers had to bring their own chairs. Travel literature constantly corrects and amazes one. Lady Mary Wortley Montague described what to her was the odd Turkish practice of scratching the skin and dribbling into it in a little pox-infected fluid so that only that portion would fester but thereafter there was no fear of small pox scarring the face and body. India had a similar practice which the British banned as barbaric, or so I have been told. I do know that medical students are taught that the history of vaccination began not with the Turks or the Indians, but with Edward Jenner.

George Eliot, who, Virginia Woolf said had written the only novel for adults in the nineteenth century – she was referring to *Middlemarch* — and who is perpetually impressive because of her generous seriousness, believed that travel was the best education. She also said that those who could not travel must read books. She didn't exactly say that they must read travel books (actually she said they should read novels), but she was a great traveller herself, and her finest novels are metaphoric journeys of experience and growth. Travel is not just an outward journey but a return with greater knowledge. There is an entire article in the *Encyclopaedia* full of lovely mind-expanding ideas on what is travel writing: travel is a displacement in space, a reflection on the nature of displacement, a representation of the journey and of the symbolic significance of movement.

Travel writing can be magical; it can mysteriously summon others to follow, almost like Jesus called to utterly ordinary people to follow him, and that's how we get copycat journeyers — Robert Byron was followed by Bruce Chatwin – but the original is rarely exceeded. (Travel and travel writing are marked by digressions, so let me quickly say that Robert Byron's *Road to Oxiana* which has to be read by anyone who likes travel is now widely available in a new paperback edition.) In *An Inland Voyage*, R.L.Stevenson, one of my favourite travel writers, develops the conceit that travel involving sustained physical exercise offers an escape from organized thought and conscious identity. He calls this "'the furthest piece of travel accomplished' lying 'far from the beaten paths of language.'"

Perhaps that is why there is no agreement, nor is there likely to be, on how one should write about travel. Ulysses, *jiskey paon nahin tikte thé*, was always on the move. A great teller of travellers' tales, he mixed fact and fiction. That remains the stuff of travel writing, but critics fastidiously distinguish travel from tourism (Byron, Lord George Gordon, was both). They also crib about sullying fact with fiction, which isn't a problem for readers unless they wish to follow in the tracks of Ulysses, in which case, where will they find Polyphemus? However, an academic account about travel literature, such as this *Encyclopaedia*, should be more careful with facts, but O horror, its booklist attributes *The Cenci* to Byron (Lord G.G.) rather than to Shelley, who, by the way, doesn't have an article to himself. All this traveller and travel writer (see his letters to Peacock) gets is a mention in the booklist of his sonnet "Ozymandias."

Ever since Carl Thompson, one of the contributors to this encyclopaedia, introduced me to travel writing as a discipline, I have wondered why mountain writing (by mountaineers, about mountains) is not included in travel writing. There is no entry for Himalaya, nor for the Alps nor any other mountain range. Eric Shipton? Chris Bonington? Reinhold Messner? All missing. It's as if every mountain in the world and almost all who have written about them with love and beauty didn't exist. There is no entry for the great mountain magazines and the climbing and trekking clubs. Nor, by the way, is there anything about the *Babur Nama* or Hiuen Tsang.

As with Routledge's *Encyclopaedia of Romanticism*, the exclusiveness of this *Encyclopaedia* is disappointing, and yet its range, detail, suggestions for further reading, and lively style are terrific. Anyone interested in the world, anyone who has travelled or wants to travel, anyone who likes reading about travel, and certainly anyone who wants to become acquainted with the many-sided discipline of travel writing will love these volumes, wonderfully bound in blue, red, and gold covers with a 16th century map of the Caribbean.

Viewing the Islamic Orient: British Travel Writers of the Nineteenth Century by Pallavi Pandit Laisram is tedious reading. The travellers she has written about are James Morier, Alexander Kinglake, Richard Burton, and Gertrude Bell, but it seems to be her PhD thesis that has not been worked upon sufficiently to turn it into a book for the general public. This may be more the editor's fault than the writer's but even as a PhD thesis it is boring. There is not a single insight as far as I can tell, a lot of the text reads like patchwork of others' work, ("as so and so says" – so and so should in any case be in footnotes), there's a dull predictability to her statements (that Englishman and this have a prejudice against the natives), there's the now standard critique of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, and it is not particularly inspired. Most of the time I was bewildered by Laisram's categories:

> Britain's relationship with the other major power in the Islamic Orient, Turkey, was of a similar nature [to the one it had with Persia] in that it fluctuated between arrogance and alliance (p.18).

Arrogance and alliance? What kind of explanatory twinning is this! She is thoroughly unfair to Lady Mary Wortley Montague ("Lady Montague's vision of the Orient as the sensuous world of *Arabian Nights* is a manifestation of the static approach to the Orient." p.35), which makes me wonder if she and I have read the same Lady Mary. Her language does not make it any easier to read the book.

> (Pratt's) study *demonstrates* that Burton's *portrayal* of the *scenery surrounding* Lake Tangyanika is like the description of a painting." (p.35, my italics).

Laisram's account of Gertrude Bell is livelier than the rest, but her prevailing style is the thus-we-see-that one so beloved of undergraduates:

> Morier's background reveals two influences on his perspective of the Orient: experience of life in an Oriental community, and a traditional European academic perspective on it (p.43).

Readers can surely figure out that two statements amount to two items they have to take note of, and an editor should have told her that using the same word twice in a sentence is a stylistic blunder. And so on and on it goes. Perhaps Laisram's next book will be on *A traditional European academic perspective.* Those of us who struggle to teach the development of ideas will struggle no more for we would have learnt what this single academic perspective shared by all of Europe for all time is.■

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Cultural Referents

Jean Marie Lafont

FORTS & PALACES OF INDIA: SENTINELS OF HISTORY
By Bindu Manchanda
Roli Books, Delhi, 2006, pp.192, price not stated.

Forts & Palaces of India is a beautiful book showing what has already been done and what is in the process of being done concerning Cultural Heritage and intelligent tourism in some parts of India.

Forts and palaces in India are increasingly becoming a cultural reference for the concerned regions and communities of the country. They are also a new source of income for their private owners (be they the descendants of the erstwhile princely families or more recent owners) or for the different states considering the increase of tourism in India for the last number of years, and its expected growth in the coming ten years. Hence the number of recent books usually well written and richly illustrated, like the *Rajput Palaces* by G.H.R.Tillotson (1999), becoming the source of a new, regenerated approach to this old history of princely architecture and military traditions.

Bindu Manchanda's *Forts & Palaces of India* tries to encapsulate in a few pages and many beautiful illustrations the essence of imperial, royal and feudal India from its earliest time (6th -10th centuries in the case of Mandu) until the eve of the Independence of India (the Umaid Bhawan of Jodhpur, started in 1929 and completed in 1944).

The author, who was Director (Projects) of INTACH and is Secretary of the Jaisalmer Heritage Trust, has written a short presentation (pp. 14-21) to introduce India as "The Land of Forts and Palaces", spanning almost three millennia of Indian history from the "*pur*" (Greek "*polis*") of the *Vedas* to the "Modern Era". After summarizing what we know of Sanskrit texts dealing with palatial architecture, the author asks the inevitable question of why there are so many references to imperial and royal residences in classical literature (including visual representations in sculptures and paintings, like in Gandhara art or the paintings of Ajanta) when there is a quasi absence of impressive archaeological remains today, before what she calls "the capitals of the later empires, such as Delhi and Agra". For example, Megasthenes's description (in Greek) of Pataliputra in the last years of the 4th century BC and the subsequent archaeological discoveries done in Patna should be the norm, not the exception. We must therefore acknowledge that wide scale destructions took place in Northern India at least from the time of the Hephtalites Huns (Mihirakula and his devastating raids in the Ganga-Jamuna valleys in early 6th century AD), while the *Tarikh i-Yamini* gives explicit descriptions of the behaviour of the Ghaznavid *Ghazis* (*Jihadis*) during their raids in northern India (early 11th century AD). The Ghorids, one century later, did not behave in a much better way. An eminent scholar has recently explained what probably took place, or perhaps did not take place, in Somnath, at the hands of Mahmud Ghaznavi. Pakistani archaeologists digging a trench in the Fort of Lahore discovered, however, "a 7 feet thick layer of debris mixed with fallen mud-bricks indicating a great disturbance. The clearance of this thick deposit revealed a 12 feet high wall of mud-bricks against which much cultural debris had accumulated. This may represent the non-Muslim mud-brick Fort which is recorded to have been sacked by Mahmud of Ghazna during his fifth expedition…" (*Pakistan Archaeology*, 5, 1968). According to a living tradition in Lahore the first Muslim governor of the city, Malik Ayaz, miraculously rebuilt the Fort and the ramparts in one single night in the 1040's.

Coming to what survives today of this princely and military architecture which forms the topic of her book, Bindu Manchanda justly refers to G.H.R. Tillotson's "seminal work" concerning the Rajput style of palaces as distinct from the Mughal ones: let's add that the Rajput style much antecedes the Mughal one, as one can see from the many examples she provides in the main sections of the book. She gives interesting details as to how the two styles differ (location of the palaces, plans and distribution of the rooms and courtyards, details of mural decorations and elements of architecture), how they still influenced each other with the use of Hindu decorative motifs in Islamic monuments (a long time before the Mughals, as can be seen in the Qutb Minar complex in Delhi) and the adoption of the "true arch" in the "late-Hindu secular architecture". The author, following a traditional sequence in Indian historio-graphy, ends her section on "Medie-val Splendour" in the 19th century, after the British took over the greatest part of India and obliged the Indian states and Indian rulers to keep the peace "and left the Indian maharajas with caches of money that had earlier been spent on maintaining huge armies and waging wars".

The next section, entitled "The Modern Era", spans from the British paramountcy over India to the years immediately after Independence, and up to the present condition of these Forts and Palaces. From Indo-Saracenic to Neo-Rajput and Art-deco style palaces, Bindu Manchanda covers one and a half centuries of prestigious, expensive and, more often than not, fantastic buildings that gave the Nizam, the Maharajas and the Nawabs such a reputation of richness and profligacy around the world. She mentions Samuel Swinton Jacob, Charles Mant and Eckart Muthesius, and she could have mentioned Marcel as well in her introduction, as some of the great European architects involved in building these palaces full of French furniture and extravagant designs. There is not much mention in the book, it seems, of Indian architects who could have worked on such expansive buildings, then as earlier, although we know the names of some of these architects and calligraphists who worked for Shahjahan in the Red Forts of Agra and Shajahanabad (Delhi, where she erroneously describes the *pietra dura* representation of Orpheus in the *Diwan-i-am* as "the emperor calming animals"). The "final triumph", she rightly estimates, came with the Umaid Bhawan Palace in Jodhpur, completed by the firm of Lanchester and Lodge of London just before Independence.

After Independence, and especially after Indira Gandhi decided to strip the erstwhile royal families of the Privy Purse they had been granted by the Indian Government in order to persuade them to merge their States (Princely India) with the Union (ex-British India) in 1947-1948, it became increasingly difficult for the owners to maintain their forts and palaces. Then followed a sad period of decay and lack of maintenance, even sales or long concessions. With the opening of India to the world in the mid-1990's and the growing flow of both local and foreign tourists travelling in the country, more opportunities are arising to redevelop these forts and palaces and turn them into Heritage sites, hotels and museums. To conclude, the author underlines the fact that the "future of Indian forts and palaces seems to be brighter than what it was ten years ago. Both the government and the private owners are keenly aware of the need to maintain these priceless legacies from India's past, and also of their potential as revenue generating properties". We shall come back to these two aspects at the end of this review.

This short introduction leads us to the core of the book: the presentation of fifty forts and palaces spread all over India under sections entitled Rajasthan (23 monuments), North (8 monuments), East (2 monuments), South (9 monuments) and Central/West (8 monuments). Since the order adopted for the presentation is alphabetic, one finds four palaces of Jaipur in four separate emplacements (Amber Fort p. 25, City Palace p. 35, Jaigarh p. 46 and Rambagh Palace p. 85) with in-between descriptions of Pokhran, Udaipur, Bikaner, Samode etc. A kind of geographical deconstruction that

has some charm, of course, but also raises a few questions.

This review has no space for a word on each of the 50 monuments presented in the book. The author usually gives a brief historical description of the place, more detailed in the case of great sites likes Amber, Chittorgarh, Fatehpur Sikri, Gwalior, Mandu or Vijayanagar, and then leads us to a short directed tour inside the monument or complex of monuments. Splendid photographs by various artists or from private collections (including some old photographs as in the case of Chittor, or a superb view of Alwar from the Royal Archives in Windsor Castle etc.) help a lot in the comprehension of the text. Less known places like Dundlod Fort, Dungarpur, Nagaur, Deeg, Jagatjit Palace in Kapurthala (Punjab), the Royal Palace in Stok (Ladakh), the Padmanabhapuram Palace in southernmost India are nicely presented, even if in one single case (Kangla Fort in Imphal) no illustration is provided except an old "layout" not particularly attractive to the eyes. In a few cases, boxes are provided, giving specific information on fairly well known and much less known facts concerning some buildings or some sites: the diamond mines of Kullur near Golconda (p. 46) or the incredible Treasure Hunt of 1976 in the fort of Jaigarh (Jaipur, p. 47) showing that a whole Government as well as individuals might get mad about apocryphal stories. A mention is missing in this very box concerning the Gun Factory and its attached (and still to be developed in 2006) Museum of Artillery in the Jaigarh Fort, with the three-dimensional model exhibited there which would have been useful for people interested in the development of artillery in India: fortresses are essentially military buildings, and accessorily residential places. Some aerial views (Amber pp. 10-11, Agra, p. 128) are welcome. And I feel grateful for the illustration of the "Temple in Gingee Fort" (p. 146-147) considering the difficulty for the common people to follow the path and climb up the stairs to the top of the hill.

If one is surprised to not find upon the map (p. 9) the majestic Fort of Vellore (this 'perfect specimen of military architecture' (Murray) with its blue water ditch and its impressive ramparts), or the fort of Bidar (1428 AD.) with its huge guns, its powerful bastions and remains of royal palaces, two "palaces" in this book deal with Colonial India: the first is the Raj Bhawan of Calcutta (pp. 134-135), built by Marquess Wellesley and whose State rooms, as the author mentions, were for the first time illuminated for a grand ball to celebrate the Peace of Amiens (1802): these rooms were furnished with the chandeliers and other items purchased from the estates of Claude Martin in Lucknow, which reminds us that the Palace of Constantia, today the La Martinière School for Boys (Lucknow), would also have deserved a place in the Uttar Pradesh section of the book. The second is Fort St George in Chennai (pp. 146-147), with mention by Bindu Manchanda of the flagstaff erected by Governor Yale in 1697, the same Yale who raised the first defensive wall around "Madras Patan" and later founded Yale University, in present day USA. The inclusion of British monuments in the *Forts & Palaces of India* should have enticed the author to include the Fort of Tranquebar as well, one of the most picturesque, well preserved and romantic fortifications on the Coromandel coast, built by the Danes in 1620 (first phase).

This reminds us again of the military purpose of most of these forts, and the parallel evolution of the gun and the wall (what has been called in French "*la dialectique du canon et de la muraille*"). One can actually trace from the Portuguese forts (16th-17th centuries) to the Fort of Bidar and to Sindhia's and de Boigne's Fort of Aligarh, and then Maharaja Ranjit Singh's Fort of Govindgarh (Amritsar, but also the remaining Sikh ramparts and bastions of the Fort of Lahore) the emergence and evolution of modern fortifications in India, linked to the modernization of the armed forces of the country and the introduction and spread in the Indian States of European military technologies right from the early years of the 16th century: hence the importance of mentioning the Gun Factory in Jaigarh, or Raymond's Gun Factory in Hyderabad. These simple questions arise from a first, quick reading of this interesting book, though they were not to be raised, nor answered, by the author since the purpose of the publication is obviously to awaken or reinforce and enlighten the public's interest for some of the most attractive tourist sites of India.

With more than half the book (pp. 25-112) dedicated to Rajasthan, *Forts and Palaces of India* is obviously targeting the national and international tourists who are travelling more and more all over India. In Rajasthan, as it is clearly shown, just as in Goa, Daman and Diu (which are totally absent in this publication), restoring and renovating the forts (and palaces) to turn them into tourist sites and Heritage Hotels (the Fort of Teracol for instance, and in the near future the Fort of Reis Magos in Goa) serve two purposes: to reinforce the historical identity of a state, especially for young generations (school children and students who visit them), and to increase revenue and employment in the same state. Foreign tourists in India recently crossed the magical number of 3 million, which was widely advertised in the press. This is not much, however, compared to the annual turnover of tourists in much smaller countries in Europe. To speak only of France, 70 million people are visiting the country every year, with 7 million of them climbing up the Eiffel Tower and 5 million visiting the Louvre Pyramid and Museum. This is to say that India has a terrific, but practically unexploited potential for tourism, which is one important aspect of the cultural policy of a country, of course, but also one of its easiest, most profitable and ascertained sources of revenue and foreign exchange.

Forts & Palaces of India is a beautiful book showing what has already been done and what is in the process of being done concerning cultural heritage and intelligent tourism in some parts of India. It shows the way, and we can say that with the help of Roli Books Bindu Manchanda has successfully accomplished her purpose.■

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A Place Like No Other

Navtej Sarna

TREASURES OF THE THUNDER DRAGON- A PORTRAIT OF BHUTAN
By Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck
Penguin Viking, Delhi, pp. 211, Rs. 495.00

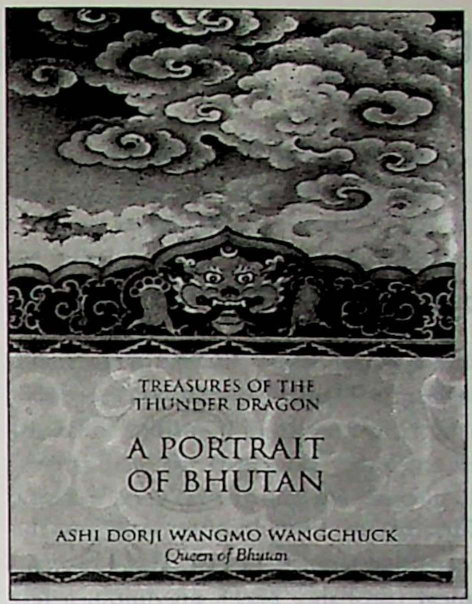
Nearly two decades ago, I made my first journey to Bhutan. I was told that I should take the road up from Phuntsoling rather than go by air, because that way I would be entering Bhutan "the right way." That was sane advice. From the moment that one crosses the Bhutan gate at Phuntsoling, one is in a way entering another world and it is best to do it gradually. As the 184 km road snakes its way across verdant valleys of incredible beauty, vanishing now into the eternal fog around Chukha and emerging under clear blue skies where the Paro Chu meets the Thimphu Chu in a dramatic confluence, Bhutan's charm begins to wind around the heart, unobtrusively but ineluctably.

Leaving aside the occasional coffee table book or travel guide, not much has been written about Bhutan. For that reason alone, *A Portrait of Bhutan* written by Bhutan's seniormost queen, Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck, is a valuable contribution. In just two hundred pages, the book seamlessly weaves travel with history, legend with custom, nature with development. Written as part memoir and part travelogue, the book succeeds eminently in providing the reader an insight into various aspects of Bhutanese life and shows how a people of charming traditions and deep religious beliefs have successfully handled the challenges of modernism and development.

Ashi Dorji Wangmo takes us on many journeys. She takes us deep into Bhutan's past, its animistic Bon traditions and the later advent of Mahayana Buddhism, brought in dramatically by Guru Padmasambhava flying on a tigress to the precarious perch where Takhtsang monastery today stands in Paro valley. She tackles the difficult questions of the formation of a nation under the Zhabdrung and subsequent establishment of the present monarchy. Several delicate issues in Bhutan's history are explained, including the courageous manner in which the present King healed the wounds that existed between the monarchy and the descendants of the Zhabdrung, including the family of the present queens.

And there are the fascinating physical journeys. There are vivid memories of the journeys that the author along with Ashi Tshering Pem, her closest sibling and Bhutan's second queen, used to take to go to school at St Helen's in Kurseong. Those were days when the road from Phuntsholing to Thimphu had barely been completed and vehicles were a rarity. The journey from Punakha to Thimphu still had to be conducted on horseback. A Willys jeep—the first vehicle ever seen by many Bhutanese-was treated with awe and often offered trays of boiled eggs and fresh grass as if it were an animal, tired after a strenuous climb. The reader can follow the author along the east-west highway, crossing one incredible valley after another, climbing up through forests of blue pine, clinging to a corkscrew road above deep gorges and onrushing mountain rivers, resting at passes where clouds nestle on the rhododendron bushes and prayer flags send forth blessings from the holy scriptures to all living beings. And one can walk with her along steep mountain paths to towering dzongs and remote ancient temples, mingling with yak herders, picking wild strawberries and wonder at the peace that can come from the tinkling of a bell attached to a prayer wheel constantly rotated by a little brook running down the hillside. Reflections alongside on Bhutan's architecture, traditional paintings, the annual fairs and dance festivals of every valley, traditional Bhutanese medicine, the curative powers of hot springs, the institution of polyandry in certain parts add a valuable depth and texture to the narrative.

There are also journeys of the mind and the spirit, fascinating for those



who believe and mysterious even to the sceptic. A recurrent dream takes the author to what was possibly her previous life, to a house with a courtyard in which orange trees grow where she meets those who could well be her grandchildren from the past. And on a tour with the King in eastern Bhutan there is the amazing discovery of a reincarnation of the Desi, the seventeenth century civil ruler of Bhutan. A surreal conversation between the four year old boy lama and His Majesty leads ultimately to the installation of the boy as the recognized reincarnate Desi, in Tango monastery at the narrow head of the Thimphu valley.

Yes, all this can happen as part of daily life in Bhutan. Reincarnate lamas can be seen driving SUVs, monks work on ancient scrolls on their laptops in remote monasteries, western educated youth happily go back into village homes to eat air dried yak meat and drink home made ara, hi-tech bows bring new power and speed to ancient archery meets, Nike shoes go well with the traditional gho and kira….. Ashi Dorji Wangmo helps us put much of this into the proper perspective, patiently explaining the traditions, weeding out the contradictions. After all this is a country that measures its growth not in terms of Gross National Product but Gross National Happiness, a concept based on the conviction that material wealth alone does not lead to happiness, that development and modernization should not be at the cost of quality of life and traditional values. In practical terms, socio-economic development should be such that prosperity is shared by all regions; the pristine environment is protected zealously, the country's unique cultural heritage is promoted and preserved and people are encouraged to participate in the process of governance.

The portrait of her country that Ashi Dorji Wangmo paints, unpretentiously and sympathetically, will attract many visitors to Bhutan. And it will make those who have already been there, like this writer, yearn to go back. For no one who has spent any reasonable time in that unique country, a place quite like no other in the world, can come away untouched. He must remain smitten forever.■

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Putting Curry in the Picture

Mathew Angus

CURRY: A TALE OF COOKS AND CONQUERORS
By Lizzie Collingham
Vintage, U.K., 2006, pp. 318, £8.99

As a young child, in late 1970's Britain, I would often walk into the kitchen to find my mother making a curry. To this day I can still picture it; some kind of meat (probably beef), an onion, a few teaspoons of curry powder and for that touch of exotica, it would be topped off with some raisins. She never served it to me, as she knew I hated it and I cannot remember seeing her eat it either. My parents divorced in the 1980s and following my father's departure from the household the 'curry' was never seen again.

It wasn't until the 1990s that curry came back into my life. I had been invited to a birthday celebration – an all male affair – and the 'lads' and I went to a typical UK-style Indian restaurant. The practice whereby gangs of drunk young men pile into their local curry house is referred to in the UK as 'going for an Indian' and it is more of a tradition in the UK than the Royal Family or tea and biscuits. But I had never done it before, and it was in that curry house that I first realized that there was more to curry than just eating a novel cuisine.

The lads treated curry eating as a hobby, a sport even. They would sit around the table and coldly study the menu. Curry eating as a sport is a bit like poker. It involves a player trying to work out the exact balance between ordering a meal that can actually be enjoyed (hence not wasting £30) while at the same time trying to eat the spiciest dish possible. A player must effectively place their bets by ordering. The person who eats the spiciest curry wins, but if two players go for the same level of spice, everyone else will, sadistically observe them throughout the meal and later judge who coped with it the best – sweating, crying or ordering too much beer or water will lose a player points, just as a gymnast might make a fall. The prize is the respect of your peer group, who will consider the winner more of a 'man', but the chap who comes in second will still earn respect and can make jokes down the pub about the physiological effects the dish has caused the day after. Pure entertainment; the British gave India cricket and the Indians give the Brits curry eating, a perfect deal. But while many books have been written on the history of cricket, not so many have been written on the history of curry – enter Lizzie Collingham with her new book *Curry: A Tale of Cooks and Conquerors*, perhaps there I can find the reasons why my mother's 'curry' was so awful and why the lads find curry so enticing?

Collingham, a freelance scholar and writer, has clearly applied her skills to setting out the history of India through the medium of food. Her book is truly fascinating for anyone who is interested in India, food and how the curry developed into its various forms around the world.

Every chapter of the book examines a significant stage in the evolution of curry and couples this with the relevant era of rule in India, sometimes with a link to a particular dish or drink. By way of example, chapter two is entitled, 'Biryani: The Great Mughals' and Collingham concisely explains, from Babur through to Aurangzeb, the Mughals' eating habits and why they ate particular foods – such as meat and their prized pilau. But she also describes the social and religious reasons for particular eating practices at the time. For instance, it was an eye-opener to me, as a westerner, to discover that brahmins once used to eat meat with vegetarianism only later being seen as a moral statement, essentially on animal welfare grounds and encouraged by the growth of Buddhism and Jainism. A further moralistic reason for vegetarianism was that what one ate was also considered to affect one's behaviour. The brahmins, who, according to Collingham "*used to exercise priestly rites of sacrifice*" became vegetarians and condemned meat eating as they considered it "*heightened the passions and encouraged the virile, animal side of human nature*".

A further revelation for many will be the travels of the chilli, contained in the chapter 'Vindaloo: The Portuguese and the Chilli Pepper'. Indian cuisine is famous world over for its spiciness, but as an Englishman who is constantly goaded by Indian friends that British cuisine is bland and boring, it appears that (historically at least) Indian food was just as bland before the Portugese turned up with the chilli. Collingham also explains, amongst other things, how the chilli travelled with European sea travellers from the Indies to India. It was the South Indians in particular who lovingly adopted the chilli, but most interesting is Collingham's account of how the chilli travelled to North India with the Marathas. Allegedly fuelled by the fiery qualities of the chilli, the Marathas saw off the Portuguese (who had brought the chilli with them in the first place) and also overthrew the Mughals, who had by that time become too used to the good life. Perhaps this is one reason why the lads, being such fit, virile young men, were so attracted to spicy meat dishes?

Collingham's book is particularly good at putting curry in the British context. It is in the chapter 'Curry Powder: bringing India to Britain' that I actually find the explanation for my mother's awful 'curry'. Here Collingham sets out the various ways in which the curry came to Britain and her colonies. Wealthy ex East India Company employees would bring their cooks back to England (and then often dump them in London), wives of soldiers or officials would note recipes while in India and specialist recipe books began to appear. But while care was taken initially with the accuracy of the recipes (Collingham notes that, "*[w]hen curry first appeared in a British cookery book, no mention was made of curry powder*") various spice mixtures would be collected and the generic term curry powder came about. From then on the British-style curry 'evolved' as dishes were often not prepared properly and British curries began to resemble "*spice filled casseroles*". Also, British cooks, sometimes knowing full well what went into a pukka Indian dish would look for ways to emulate particular tastes not easily available in Britain, for example by trying to replace mangoes with apples or sour gooseberries as a substitute for tamarind. Collingham observes that "*[a]fter time, these ingredients were no longer viewed as substitutes for more authentic ingredients but as essential components of a good curry*". And the sultanas that mother would add to the curry? They were, in Collingham's own words, "*sometimes added to Mughlai pilaus [and] also found their way into curries…[t]hey added a touch of the exotic and perhaps it was thought that they complemented the apples*" – eureka!

All in all, Collingham has produced a highly interesting, often humorous, fact-filled book that should be very popular in both the West and the Sub-Continent. She has topped-off each chapter with pertinent recipes for readers to try at home; much more satisfying than sultanas.■

The book is truly fascinating for anyone who is interested in India, food and how the curry developed into its various forms around the world.Every chapter of the book examines a significant stage in the evolution of curry and couples this with the relevant era of rule in India, sometimes with a link to a particular dish or drink.

Matthew Angus is a lover of Indian food.

Art On A Monumental Scale

Ratan Parimoo

INDIAN PAINTING: THE GREAT MURAL TRADITION
By Mira Seth
Harry N. Abrams Inc. New York, Mapin Publishing, Ahmedabad, 2006, pp. 464, price not stated.

The first thing that struck me about the book was that it was of large format and well-printed, covering a subject of India's Art History on which no comprehensive book had been published so far. Historically speaking, one of the earliest rediscoveries of Indian art, the Ajanta caves and the mural paintings inside these caves had aroused much interest during the last quarter of nineteenth century. Since then not only have further discoveries been made, but also have been taken up for study of the subject-matter, understanding the styles of Indian paintings in general and mural painting in particular, the ingredients used in the technique and their application, whether it was pure fresco (wet on wet ground) or mixed, i.e. 'a secco', wet on dry ground. For all these explorations, textual sources have been scrutinized. Such studies have also led to locating the survival of these techniques as well as the hereditary craftsmen and painters. The technical recipes described in texts have been corelated and verified with the actual materials used in existing murals by earlier scholars. Separately, the Ajanta murals have been extensively copied, photographed and published. The murals of Kerala and those of Ladakh, have also been repeatedly published. This book brings all this material, that is most of the mural styles as well as the textual and other information gathered so far, as the phrase goes, 'between the two covers'. The regional mural styles are parallel to the styles of the respective miniature paintings. Thus the mural style of a particular province of the country completes the kind of pictorial tradition prevailing in that region.

The author of the book, Mira Seth, has already established that she is a serious scholar of India's mural tradition through her earlier studies on the Himalayan region and Rajasthan. It needed both commitment and persistence to have taken up the study of mural works of the entire country. The book is truly an achievement of a life time of dedication. It is also a happy situation that an American publisher ventured to sponsor the study of India's achievement in mural painting on an ambitious scale. Combined with these two situations is the participation of the relevant government agencies who did the tedious task of travelling to the sites and photographing the murals requiring special equipment of lighting and photography. All these three deserve accolades: the publisher, the government personnel besides the author for this beautiful publication.

Murals, that is painted images on large scale are outstanding only when they are infused with monumental quality. This was gradually realized by connoisseurs since their discovery. On large surfaces the Indian artist faced the challenge of mastering as many aspects of line, firstly spontaneity and firmness, secondly the characteristic of volume or giving the form a certain substantiality and dimension. And of course the qualities of rhythm and lyricism, and finally an overall effect and expressiveness. The most significant aspect of the classical mural painting tradition of India is the fact that it has existed, thrived and continued outside the period and sphere of Mughal patronage (which was mainly between mid 16th to mid 17th centuries). Therefore the entire body of mural paintings represents cogent and forthright evidence supporting Ananda Coomraswamy's contention of how ingrained the art of painting (on paper, cloth and walls) has been in the Indian culture for the last two thousand years, concerning which references abound in Sanskrit texts confirming the existing of painted halls (Chitravithi) as well as portable scroll paintings on cloth by picture showmen.

...the book was of large format and well-printed, covering a subject of India's Art History on which no comprehensive book had been published so far. Historically speaking, one of the earliest rediscoveries of Indian art, the Ajanta caves and the mural paintings inside these caves had aroused much interest during the last quarter of nineteenth century.

The book is divided into four chapters, Introduction, Centres of Wall Paintings: Deccan and South India; Centres of Wall Painting: North and East India; Technique and style.

First and fourth chapters comprise mainly text materials. The author has devoted the middle two chapters for the survey of the surviving mural traditions of the various regions of India. In this major portion of the book the relevant historical and descriptive text as well as the colour reproductions are interspersed together. The text covers information about ruling dynasties as patrons as well as clues for dating the existing monuments with in situ murals, description of their content and some stylistic observations. It was natural that chapter two should begin with the Ajanta caves, where in the caves I, II, IX, X, XVI and XVII have fortunately survived, now world-recognized impressive murals. It so happens that Ajanta is the name of the village situated near the hills, and not a new name given to the site. The earlier caves were excavated during Satavahana rule and the majority of other caves were excavated and painted during the Vakataka rule. Cave XVI's patronage is particularly recorded which was commissioned by Varahadeva, the chief minister of Vakataka King, Harisena, between 480-500. The name has been misprinted as Varahamihira. Among the textual sources the author has mixed up *Lalitavistara* with *Buddha Charita*. It is the latter text which is authored by Ashwaghosh. However both texts could have provided information on episodes of Buddha's life. Cave XVI has some of the best narrative sequences including the very expressive depiction of fainting of Nanda's newly married wife on hearing that he had become a monk. It was always admired and known as 'the Dying Princess'. Some of the important animal Jatakas are depicted in cave XVII, viz, Saddanta, Mahakapi, Matriposaka. The cave also contains the elaborate depiction of Simhala Avadana. Inside cave I, on the inner wall serving as entrance to the ante-chamber, have been painted the famous Boddhisattvas opposite each other, Padmapani and Vajrapani. The most elaborate Mahajanaka Jataka is also inside this cave. Some of the murals in cave II have been identified as episodes from Buddha's life. It has the very impressive depiction of Vidurapandita Jataka. Paintings at Bagh, Badami and Ellora caves have been briefly mentioned at the end of this section.

Under the heading 'Tamil Painting' have been covered murals during the rule of Pallavas, Pandyas, Cholas and Vijayanagar kings from seventh to seventeenth centuries. The author delves into the phenomenon of extensive patronage for mural paintings by the Kings, merchant class and the devotees. Special mention survives in the Tamil inscriptions referring to consistent patronage provided by Chola royal ladies for temple construction and embellishments. Through the existing body of South Indian mural paintings we are able to observe the unmistakable continuity of the tradition which had matured at the Ajanta caves.

Pallava period murals are in Kailashnath Temple at Kanchi preserved in cells 23, 26, 27, 34, 41 and 42. They depict themes which mostly relate to Shiva. Pandya period paintings are represented at Sittanaivasal. Vijaya Cholishwaram is the first Chola temple with wall paintings dating to the ninth century. Once its Garbhagriha was entirely covered with wall paintings but now only a few portions of human anatomy can be made out. However,

the largest body of Chola murals have survived in the splendid Brihadishwara Temple at Thanjavur. They are painted on the walls of the ambulatory chambers behind the Garbhagriha dating from 11 to 17th centuries. The monumental painted Nataraja image is an outstanding example along with panels delineating dancing figures in graceful movements. Vijayanagar style paintings are preserved in Virupaksha temple at Hampi and Lepakshi temple near Anantpur.

It is well known that Krishnadevaraya (1509-1529) was the great ruler of this dynasty. At Virupaksha, noteworthy murals are based on the themes from Shiva Purana, such as Manmath aiming his arrow at Shiva, and Shiva-Parvati wedding ceremony. The most impressive murals from Lepakshi are those in the Mukhamandapa delineating the Kiratarjuniya episodes. There is also a historical mural portraying the brothers Virupanna and Viranna. Nayaka rulers were actually feudatory vassals of Vijayanagara kings who also patronized temple construction. At this period the pictorial style changes which is now relatively dominated by outlines, but they have a flow and contribute to a certain element of volume to the human figure. The most characteristic examples of this style are preserved at Tirupparutikunram temple at Kanchi. The themes are episodes from the lives of Tirthankaras such as Mahavira and Neminath. The paintings at Jain math in Shravana Belagola also belong to the Nayaka period. Here events from the life of Parshvanath are extensively depicted.

Among the surviving mural paintings in Kerala are those from the Pallimanna temple, dating from late seventeenth century. Situated in Trichur district is also another large temple, the Vadakkunathan temple. Murals were executed in Trivanchikulam Shiva temple during the eighteenth century, as well as in the Varkar Shiva temple and Rama temple at Tripayar. In the holy shrine at Guruvayoor are also mural paintings depicting Krishna's childhood. Some impressive mural paintings have survived at Pundareekapuram temple in Allepey district. But extensive paintings were carried out at the Padmanabhapuram Palace (near Trivandrum) and at the Mattancheri Palace (Cochin). The Kerala school of mural painting is distinct and unique. The human figure types, both male and female tend to be muscular and swarthy and therefore the Kerala painter once again extensively uses the technique of volume and three-dimensionality. Even when profuse decorative details are delineated, the Kerala painters were able to represent emotional expressions of wonder, anger or fright. In my opinion the Kerala wall paintings should be considered the final stage of Indian classical mural tradition which had matured at Ajanta.

Chapter III deals with mural paintings from North India (why East India is printed along with it is baffling). While discussing the mural paintings in Ladakh the author takes up the spread of Buddhism in that region explaining certain forms of Vajrayana Buddhist iconography. Inspite of lack of agricultural land, Ladakh's economy grew due to its location at the crossroads of trade between Central Asia on one end and Kashmir and Himachal at the other end. Besides, the growing religious links with Tibet inspired the phenomenon of construction of monastries. However, until the 16th century the artistic connections with Kashmir have ben retained which is noticeable especially in the architectural style of Alchi monastery buildings and mural paintings. Inscriptions survive at Alchi referring to the patronage of the local ruler and monks during the eleventh century. Remarkable murals at Alchi Sumtsek are the 'Aristocratic Couple in their House', 'Mahakala', an elaborate Goddess Tara, a Queen with a prince and Lama, Dhyani Buddha Akshobhya and eleven-headed Avalokiteshvara. Their style is often referred to as 'Kashmiri', however, one is reminded of the further eye in western Indian miniature paintings of the 15th century. Lha Khang Soma temple at Alchi has the depiction of historical gurus like Shantarakshita, narrative panels pertaining to Buddha's life events in the format of narrow horizontal panels again reminding of miniature paintings. Murals at Lamayuru Monastery reveal influence of Tibetan and to some extent Chinese style.

Saspol caves have painted murals which are similar to the style of Alchi monastery. Besides the goddess Vajravarahi and Yabyum pair of Chakra Sambara, the depiction of the often noticed two seated figures, are noteworthy. The paintings in the dukhang of Phyang monastery represent the growing Tibetan influences. The monastery at Hemis has a Bhutanese connection and the paintings date from seventeenth century. The 'Wheel of Life' is an outstanding mural. The Mongol Chinese elements are now prominent as also in the 19th century murals in the monasteries at Stakna, Samar and Tiklse.

Buddhist murals were executed at Tabo Monastery in the Spiti Valley of Himachal Pradesh, which is still functional today for Buddhist worship in the region. According to surviving inscriptions, the monastery was built during the 10th century and Tantric Siddhas had settled there. Themes such as the life of the Buddha and the episodes of Sadhana's quest for enlightenment are depicted on the walls. The narrative element is more conspicuous than at Ladakh. Stylistically the Tabo murals remind of both the Ajanta mural tradition as well as Indian miniature paintings.

Coverage of mural paintings in Rajasthan opens with Harauti or the Kotah-Bundi region. The most important and extensive paintings are in the Bundi Fort, earliest of them in Badal Mahal from the 18th century. Some of these are Rukmini Harana and Ramayana scenes on the walls and Rasa Lila on the ceiling. In Phool Mahal is a large court scene set in the Raja's terrace garden; in Chatra Mahal an impressive Radha and Krishna with Gopis, a royal shikar; in Chitrashala the feudal darbar below which is delineated the bazaar section of the town, also Krishna in Vrindavan. Kotah Fort has typical murals in the style familiar to us through 18th century miniature paintings of shikar on paper. Murals have been painted at the Jodhpur Mahamandir. 18th century murals still survive at Udaipur fort in the late Mewar style. Murals were executed in the Fort at Dungarpur during the 19th century. At Amber near Jaipur interesting murals have survived in Pundarikji ki Haveli, representing the Maharaja's participation in the Gangaur festival.

Mural paintings of the Pahari style in Himchal Pradesh and the Jammu region comprise the last and the most recent phase covered in the book. In the early 19th century Sansar Chand was the most enthusiastic patron of mural paintings such as at the Gauri Shankar temple in Sujanpur Tira. His wife Prasani Devi had commissioned murals at Narmadeshvara temple. Murals have been executed in the Vaishnava matha at Dharamsal and also at a Matha in Amtal. Kulu contains the largest number of wall paintings in the region. One of them depicting Tripurasundari Devi is preserved at the National Museum, Delhi. In the Jammu region murals were executed during Dogra rule in Raghunathji Mandir in the Bhurj at Puramandal and at Mule Chak and also in the Raghunathji Mandir situated in Purani Mandi of Jammu town. Interestingly in a remote town of Ramnagar in Udhampur district have been painted some fine murals depicting Suchet Singh's wedding.

In the fourth chapter information from the Shilpa texts has been compiled. There is a lengthy discussion on the stylistic history of Indian miniature paintings with which the mural phenomenon has been interlinked. Mention is made of influence of Indian painting outside its boundaries in Tibet and Thailand and in Sri Lanka.

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Book News **Book News**

International Social Work: Issues, Strategies and Programs by David Cox and Manohar Pawar provides an integrated perspectives approach to international social work and social development practice to give readers alternative theoretical framework not found in other books.
Vistaar Publication, 2006, pp. 422, Rs. 595.00

Marine Life in India by B.F. Chhapgar is compact, engaging and easy-to-read and full of fascinating facts, illustrations and photographs.
Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2006, pp. 368, Rs. 350.00

Tribute to An Exotic Persona

G. Arunima

AMRITA SHER-GIL: A LIFE
By Yashodhara Dalmia
Viking India, 2006, pp. 207, Rs. 695.00

Biographies are by virtue of their genre exciting and perplexing. Poised as these are at the intersection of life, memory, history and sometimes even fiction, they create a problem for the biographer or historian. While the purpose of the biography is to focus on an individual's life rendering it special and unique, the historian's engagement with the individual is often via the filter of society and wider categories like class, race, region or gender which may illuminate certain conditions that enable the existence of such a life.

Amrita Sher-Gil is probably the most significant 20th century painter who heralded the changing direction of modern Indian art[1]. Of Indo-Hungarian origin, Sher-Gil's short life (she died at the age of 28) was intense, exotic and amazingly productive. Her best known works were painted within a short span of just over a decade – a period in which her style evolved as a result of changing influences and experimentation. Yashodhara Dalmia's meticulously researched biography situates Sher-Gil's life within a dramatically unfolding history that encompasses a family, two continents, and the vicissitudes of changing artistic currents that shaped this extraordinary young artist's work.

Biographies are by virtue of their genre exciting and perplexing. Poised as these are at the intersection of life, memory, history and sometimes even fiction, they create a problem for the biographer or historian. While the purpose of the biography is to focus on an individual's life rendering it special and unique, the historian's engagement with the individual is often via the filter of society and wider categories like class, race, region or gender which may illuminate certain conditions that enable the existence of such a life. Moreover, the biography, as a history of personal life, is also concerned constantly with the problem of the 'real' and the question of truth. In India, the earliest biographies seem to be either of political people or of literary/creative figures. Both these reflect the growth of a public persona rather than reveal the intricacies of a private life. However, what is worth reflecting on for a moment is that such a narrative strategy is a consequence of a division between public and private, which begs the questions that have confronted western biographers—why should a biography be about privacy, or privacy alone? Why should a revelation be more truthful than what may be already available within the public domain?



Questions of truth, veracity and privacy apart, the biography of a painter also directs us back to issues that have dogged art historical, and critical, writing for several decades. Is art the product of an unusual creative genius? Are terms like 'greatness', 'hero' or 'master' that return us to an earlier era of writing that validated originality and intentionality relevant when one asks questions of both the historical context and ways of interpreting a painting? Such questions become even more complicated when posed of a woman artist – a category that remains unstable as its meaning is derived in relation to dominant male paradigms of art and femininity.[2] This perforce means that women artists are normally absent within the conventional renderings of art history, and even when they make an appearance they are aberrant geniuses whose work is often overshadowed by the salacious details of their private lives. The effect of such prurience is to represent creativity in women as a residue of some psychological trauma; the same in the case of men contributes towards creating the persona of a maverick genius. Alternatively, the history of women artists is almost always appended to that of their kinsmen (for instance the identification of the artists Marietta Robusti as Tintoretto's daughter, Gwen John as Augustus John's sister or the sculptor Camille Claudel as Rodin's model and lover, to name only a few) thus rendering their work as somewhat subservient to, and dependent on, the work of their male mentors. Feminist art historians, particularly in the West, have been addressing such issues in the past three decades. While initially the attempt was to restore women artists to the history of art, increasingly there is a move away from what could be construed as the creation of an alternative canon. Also, central to the feminist art historical enterprise has been to critique essentializing categories of analysis that would interpret the work of women artists simply in terms of 'female imagery' or 'women's experience', but to read a work of art in a manner not dissimilar from a literary text. Therefore, it is important to locate an art-work, on the one hand, in a context that is constituted by the overlapping threads of ideological, economic, social and political conditions. On the other, it is also necessary to weave this into an understanding of the representational issues facing the artist, which may have resulted in particular choices of form, colour or convention.

Some of these questions are relevant while reading Yashodhara Dalmia's erudite, and engagingly written biography. Drawing on a rich and enormous corpus of private papers and photographs, which is supplemented by interviews with Sher-Gil's personal, and artistic acquaintances, she recreates a life

that was shaped by birth, period and the quest for a national identity. The strength of the biography lies in the deftness and sensitivity with which Dalmia reconstructs the period with details of social and urban spaces, the art world, and the lifestyle of the elite in the interwar period in Europe and India. Sher-Gil traced her genealogy from Sikh aristocracy on her father's and Hungarian bourgeoisie on her mother's side. Such a heady combination of privilege meant that she inherited the internationalism, and cultured sensibilities of the elite – her brief life was marked by travel, music, salons and other forms of entertainment that were a routine part of high society. Though she spent brief spells in her early childhood and later with her cousin and husband Victor Egan in Hungary, the bulk of her life was spent in India (at Shimla, Lahore and Saraya). It was in Shimla that she first began formal drawing lessons, and at the age of 16, the family moved to Paris in order to provide Sher-Gil with a proper art education. As Dalmia points out, the decision by the family to migrate in order to educate their daughter, that too in art, was entirely atypical within the Indian context. However, looked at another way, it was unusual even within the context of the lives of women artists in other parts of the world. In many ways, Amrita Sher-Gil's privileged background provided her with resources, both material and social, that most women artists would have had to struggle for. This is clear from the fact that throughout her life, Sher-Gil was supported financially by her parents, and did not live off the sales of her paintings that in her own lifetime did not fetch much money. It is equally evident from the social world that she inhabited naturally (Karl Khandalavala, the Ukil brothers, Malcolm Muggeridge, Badruddin Tyabji and Jawaharlal Nehru were only a few of the luminaries who constituted her world), which meant that even though she may not have had much monetary recompense for her art, she certainly had received enormous critical acclaim within a very short period of time.

This of course makes Sher-Gil a rather unusual figure not only in the context of Indian art but also when situated within a wider ethnography of women artists worldwide. Despite her fraught relationship with her mother in later life, and the requisite amount of creative stress during her lifetime, e comes across as a strong, articulate and self-assured young woman. In t, to my mind it is this paradox that makes Amrita Sher-Gil that much ore interesting, and therefore difficult to place within an art historical adition. However, Dalmia's reading of Sher-Gil's life does not explore the issue of selfhood, subjectivity or agency sufficiently. From her earliest recollection of herself, Sher-Gil comes across as someone independent and who resented correction, or interference, with her work. She was intensely aware of her talents and by most accounts, her beauty, and this added to her confidence and poise as a person and an artist. Her unabashed acknowledgement of references to her work as that of 'the descendant of the great Venetians' is an early example of her continued sense of self worth as an artist, which often appears to border on the narcissistic. In a world where women mostly listened, reflected and played muse to men, Amrita Sher-Gil swept in with her power, intensity and formidable views. On reading her letters one is struck by her extraordinary mind, as indeed her immense felicity with the art of writing and expression.

This confident sense of self is evident both in her artistic choices, as indeed the manner in which she conducted her social life, and entered into sexual and social relations. Throughout her life, Amrita Sher-Gil made conscious artistic choices of style, form, colour and subject based on what she considered to be the most appropriate and authentic form of self-expression. From an early preoccupation with nudes and self portraiture (both of which are of course reasonably common to the oeuvre of most artists), to the move away from naturalism, the choice of strong, earth colours in much of later work, or the painting of ordinary people and a stylized representation of their everyday lives were all part of her conversations with herself as an artist. Her choices were determined by both artistic influence (Renaissance, the post mpressionists, Mathura miniatures to name a few) and self-expression for instance, her choice of richer, darker colours as representing a ational artistic temperament, as opposed to the bland palette of the West). Like many women artists Sher-Gil too was isolated professionally; barring Karl Khandalavala, the art critic, she does not seem to have had a steady community of artists or critics with whom she could discuss or debate her work. She does not appear to have been part of any debates on art or aesthetics, even though her work seems to have been exhibited, created controversies, and received critical acclaim in her life time. This of course was not unusual. What seems more uncommon was her almost indifferent attitude to such an isolation, which when coupled with her constant self referentiality created an artist who was remarkably productive. Sher-Gil does not come across as an angst ridden, brooding, introvert. On the contrary, she appears as a strong, confident and intelligent woman who was not cowed down by conventions.

This is true in her personal life too, and the little that one can read into her risqué life style suggests that Sher-Gil's relationships were determined by her desires and that she made no compromises here—either in relation to her family or indeed towards her partners. Her sexual promiscuity, multiple relations and bisexuality are now legion. I think what is remarkable is that for her these were as normal a part of her self-expression as were her artistic choices. Like her contemporary, Mahatma Gandhi, Sher-Gil too was unusual not simply because she controlled her own sexuality but because she was normal and open about it. Everything about her life appears to have been in the public domain; in the context of sexuality and sexual choices, such lack of privacy would have been anathema within a conservative society. It was not simply Sher-Gil's sexual choices that were threatening; it was her sexual persona. For most men who alternatingly adored and abhorred her, she was frightening because she was openly callous in her relationships. Her androgyny was coupled with a scathing wit; her allure masked an ability to abandon with ease and pursue her true and abiding passion – art. To read sexuality into artistic choice, or indeed to recover hidden psychological reasons behind someone's sexual preference (as in Dalmia's reading of Sher-Gil's lesbian relationships and some of her art) is both reductionist and simplistic. Some of Sher-Gil's work has a playful eroticism (Young Girls and her self portrait are two good examples) but these can be read as more complex forms of self-expression than representing a fractured selfhood or a sexual preference. In fact it is this form of reading that allows Dalmia to read two such formally distinct paintings as Young Girls (1932) and Two Girls (1939) in a similar manner.

The issue of nationality and national identity is one that has often been raised in the context of both Amrita Sher-Gil's life and art. She forcefully put her hybrid origins to rest by her return to India and refashioning herself and her art in a self-consciously Indian manner. This meant abandoning western attire for the sari, painting the lives of the poor and the ordinary, and an adoption of brighter colours that signified an Indian essence to her. However, despite these conscious choices, in life and formal artistic expression, she was marked by her hybridity. National identity was to forever remain a personal quest. Sher-Gil's nation was no imagined community; it was yet another experiment in authenticating her sense of self.

Yashodhara Dalmia's biography is a rich tribute to the life of an extraordinary artist and an unusual woman. One hopes that this will be the beginning of new research on Amrita Sher-Gil that would forefront an analysis of her work as a part of revising the art historical tradition in India.■

Reference

[1] Geeta Kapur has argued that by the time of Amrita Sher-Gil's death in 1941 India was at "the threshold of what one may call primary formulations of modernism." *When Was Modernism in Indian Art*, Journal of Arts and Ideas, No. 27-28, March 1995, p.107.

[2] Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art and Society*, Thames and Hudson, 1996, p.10.

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Indian Art in Words and Images

Parul Dave Mukherji

DICTIONARY OF INDIAN ART & ARTISTS
By Pratima Sheth
Mapin Pulishers, Ahmedabad, 2006, pp. 400, Rs. 1995.00

A lavishly produced book on Indian art, *Dictionary of Indian Art & Artists* fills up a lacuna within the study of Indian art. Although the entries for contemporary Indian art are informative and exhaustive this book aims to reach back to the past as much as possible within the constraint of a dictionary format and also offers elucidation of technical terms concerning art practice. The ambitious scope of the enterprise is encapsulated by the book jacket that conjures up a collage of images from the past juxtaposed against a typical modernist painting by an abstract artist: a statue of the Sarnath Buddha and an Ajanta *Boddhisattva* jostle against a *Dasavatara* Ganjifa and a female figure by Hemendranath Mazumdar.

If one were to browse through the book, the interspersing of the words and images can cast a mesmerizing hold on one's attention and the high quality of the reproduction cannot help evoking one's admiration. Containing 1700 entries with 320 visuals in colour and black and white, emphasis on the verbal and the visual appears very balanced and carefully laid out. However, the subtitle which reads more like an afterthought – "including Technical Art Terms" in fact, constitutes an important dimension of the dictionary. For a general reader, the explication of technical terminology pertaining to the visual arts can be of great help in facilitating an easier entry into the works of art through a better understanding of the methods and material employed by the artists.

The very project of compiling a dictionary of Indian art and artists is extremely viable and important. But it appears that the author aspires to move towards two opposite directions: a. to offer basic information about various art traditions, movements, art institutions, artists and technical terms following the logic of the alphabetical order and b. to focus on evolution and context for Indian art bringing in the chronological order. It was intriguing to find two essays, one by Aban Amroliwalla and Radha Kumar titled 'Glimpses of the Evolution of Indian Art' and the other by Partha Mitter on 'Art, Nation and Identity: Colonial India—The First Phase' which are to act as a prelude to the dictionary. As the dictionary ends, the author places an article by O.P. Agarwal on 'Preservation of Art Objects' where one normally expects a conclusion.

It seems that the author imposes on the format of a dictionary that of a book with the two essays at the beginning and another at the end to frame the dictionary so that what she perceives as a lack is somehow supplemented. With the kind of remarkable research and documentation that has fed into the dictionary, the framework of the latter should have sufficed. The middle section constituting the dictionary proper stands on its own, hardly in need of a historical contextualization that the author feels compelled to insert. So while the context should have been central to the principle of organizing the dictionary, here it appears to be appended from the outside in the form of these essays.

Given the thrust of the dictionary towards modern and contemporary Indian art, the attempt to encompass a vaster time frame from 'Ajanta to Yantra' is not sustained by the entries. In fact, the wide net cast by the author over such a broad art historical terrain seems to be rather forceful intending to capture not only the whole history of Indian art since prehistoric times but also the speculative realm of traditional Indian aesthetics. This, however, may be seen as instructive for the lay reader but the ambition to be all inclusive with a special emphasis on the Indian context lands the author in a very tricky situation and detracts from the avowed aim of "providing factual information and explanation" and of avoiding any "attempt at qualitative evaluation". Contemporary Indian perspective is most relevant in understanding Indian modernism, but when its search compels the author to single-mindedly look for Indian counterparts for every western movement, the outcome leads to awkward comparisons. Take, as for instance, the entry for *Arte Povera* which was a specifically European movement is taken in the technical sense of mixed media and Indian artists like Balbir Singh Katt and Vasudha Thozur are said to exemplify the movement in India ! Again, *Rasa* and *Rasalila* follow one another alphabetically. Even keeping aside the theoretical problem of drawing a line of continuity between the traditional concepts of *rasa* and contemporary art practice, we are left wondering as to why the former finds embodiment in the works of contemporary artists whereas in the case of *Rasalila*, no specific names of artists are listed. This seems to raise the question of consistency and contradicts the guiding principle employed by the author.

Even more puzzling is the inclusion of Mesopotamian and Greek art within the dictionary of Indian art and artists, on grounds that there exists some links between the former and a contemporary artist Saroj Gogi Pal's works. To which one is apt to question the exclusion of Dhruva Mistry's works under the same entry. Does invocation of a particular tradition by an artist warrant an entry in the dictionary ? Does every mention of a technique such as 'silhouette' call for a list of Indian artists who employ it? Clearly this is a case of conflating a formal feature or a technique with a style.

If the author had focused only on Indian art from the colonial to postcolonial times, the logic of inclusion would have been better justified and a lot of arbitrary moves avoided. An important arena of popular visual culture remains ignored that had inspired many a contemporary artist. While the tremendous effort that has gone into the making of the dictionary has to be appreciated, particularly the author's careful inclusion of early 20th century women artists and some male modernist artists from regions largely ignored in modern art historiography, the problem lies in the very conceptualization of a dictionary and its claims of absolute neutrality and distance from theoretical speculation. It is less important to be all comprehensive and more crucial to accept a minimum degree of theorization that is inevitable in a project such as this. A dictionary need not make a pretension of a book for it can stand on its own if its organizational principle is clearly articulated.■

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Book News	**Book News**

Like The Flowing River: Thoughts And Reflections by Paul Coelho, author of *The Alchemist*, and translated from the Portuguese by Margaret Jull Costa is an intimate collection of his reflections and short stories --powerful tales of living and dying, of destiny and choice, of love lost and found.
HarperCollins Publishers, 2005, pp. 232, Rs. 295.00

The Betrayal And Other Stories by Sivasankari, translated in English by Ameeta Agnihotri and Geetha Radhakrishnan, is a collection which crosses language and media barriers to touch a chord in the reader.
East West Books (Madras), 2006, pp. 230, Rs. 150.00

In A Forest, A Deer: Stories by Ambai, translated from the Tamil by Lakshmi Holmstrom, are deeply moving tales which constantly reinvent the short story form; interweaving lives, juxatoposing the past and the present, the mythical and the contemporary, articulating women's experiences and communicating their silences in words and images.
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 207, Rs. 295.00

that was shaped by birth, period and the quest for a national identity. The strength of the biography lies in the deftness and sensitivity with which Dalmia reconstructs the period with details of social and urban spaces, the art world, and the lifestyle of the elite in the interwar period in Europe and India. Sher-Gil traced her genealogy from Sikh aristocracy on her father's and Hungarian bourgeoisie on her mother's side. Such a heady combination of privilege meant that she inherited the internationalism, and cultured sensibilities of the elite – her brief life was marked by travel, music, salons and other forms of entertainment that were a routine part of high society. Though she spent brief spells in her early childhood and later with her cousin and husband Victor Egan in Hungary, the bulk of her life was spent in India (at Shimla, Lahore and Saraya). It was in Shimla that she first began formal drawing lessons, and at the age of 16, the family moved to Paris in order to provide Sher-Gil with a proper art education. As Dalmia points out, the decision by the family to migrate in order to educate their daughter, that too in art, was entirely atypical within the Indian context. However, looked at another way, it was unusual even within the context of the lives of women artists in other parts of the world. In many ways, Amrita Sher-Gil's privileged background provided her with resources, both material and social, that most women artists would have had to struggle for. This is clear from the fact that throughout her life, Sher-Gil was supported financially by her parents, and did not live off the sales of her paintings that in her own lifetime did not fetch much money. It is equally evident from the social world that she inhabited naturally (Karl Khandalavala, the Ukil brothers, Malcolm Muggeridge, Badruddin Tyabji and Jawaharlal Nehru were only a few of the luminaries who constituted her world), which meant that even though she may not have had much monetary recompense for her art, she certainly had received enormous critical acclaim within a very short period of time.

This of course makes Sher-Gil a rather unusual figure not only in the context of Indian art but also when situated within a wider ethnography of women artists worldwide. Despite her fraught relationship with her mother in later life, and the requisite amount of creative stress during her lifetime, she comes across as a strong, articulate and self-assured young woman. In fact, to my mind it is this paradox that makes Amrita Sher-Gil that much more interesting, and therefore difficult to place within an art historical tradition. However, Dalmia's reading of Sher-Gil's life does not explore the issue of selfhood, subjectivity or agency sufficiently. From her earliest recollection of herself, Sher-Gil comes across as someone independent and who resented correction, or interference, with her work. She was intensely aware of her talents and by most accounts, her beauty, and this added to her confidence and poise as a person and an artist. Her unabashed acknowledgement of references to her work as that of 'the descendant of the great Venetians' is an early example of her continued sense of self worth as an artist, which often appears to border on the narcissistic. In a world where women mostly listened, reflected and played muse to men, Amrita Sher-Gil swept in with her power, intensity and formidable views. On reading her letters one is struck by her extraordinary mind, as indeed her immense felicity with the art of writing and expression.

This confident sense of self is evident both in her artistic choices, as indeed the manner in which she conducted her social life, and entered into sexual and social relations. Throughout her life, Amrita Sher-Gil made conscious artistic choices of style, form, colour and subject based on what she considered to be the most appropriate and authentic form of self-expression. From an early preoccupation with nudes and self portraiture (both of which are of course reasonably common to the oeuvre of most artists), to the move away from naturalism, the choice of strong, earth colours in much of later work, or the painting of ordinary people and a stylized representation of their everyday lives were all part of her conversations with herself as an artist. Her choices were determined by both artistic influence (Renaissance, the post Impressionists, Mathura miniatures to name a few) and self-expression (for instance, her choice of richer, darker colours as representing a national artistic temperament, as opposed to the bland palette of the West). Like many women artists Sher-Gil too was isolated professionally; barring Karl Khandalavala, the art critic, she does not seem to have had a steady community of artists or critics with whom she could discuss or debate her work. She does not appear to have been part of any debates on art or aesthetics, even though her work seems to have been exhibited, created controversies, and received critical acclaim in her life time. This of course was not unusual. What seems more uncommon was her almost indifferent attitude to such an isolation, which when coupled with her constant self referentiality created an artist who was remarkably productive. Sher-Gil does not come across as an angst ridden, brooding, introvert. On the contrary, she appears as a strong, confident and intelligent woman who was not cowed down by conventions.

This is true in her personal life too, and the little that one can read into her risqué life style suggests that Sher-Gil's relationships were determined by her desires and that she made no compromises here—either in relation to her family or indeed towards her partners. Her sexual promiscuity, multiple relations and bisexuality are now legion. I think what is remarkable is that for her these were as normal a part of her self-expression as were her artistic choices. Like her contemporary, Mahatma Gandhi, Sher-Gil too was unusual not simply because she controlled her own sexuality but because she was normal and open about it. Everything about her life appears to have been in the public domain; in the context of sexuality and sexual choices, such lack of privacy would have been anathema within a conservative society. It was not simply Sher-Gil's sexual choices that were threatening; it was her sexual persona. For most men who alternatingly adored and abhorred her, she was frightening because she was openly callous in her relationships. Her androgyny was coupled with a scathing wit; her allure masked an ability to abandon with ease and pursue her true and abiding passion – art. To read sexuality into artistic choice, or indeed to recover hidden psychological reasons behind someone's sexual preference (as in Dalmia's reading of Sher-Gil's lesbian relationships and some of her art) is both reductionist and simplistic. Some of Sher-Gil's work has a playful eroticism (Young Girls and her self portrait are two good examples) but these can be read as more complex forms of self-expression than representing a fractured selfhood or a sexual preference. In fact it is this form of reading that allows Dalmia to read two such formally distinct paintings as Young Girls (1932) and Two Girls (1939) in a similar manner.

The issue of nationality and national identity is one that has often been raised in the context of both Amrita Sher-Gil's life and art. She forcefully put her hybrid origins to rest by her return to India and refashioning herself and her art in a self-consciously Indian manner. This meant abandoning western attire for the sari, painting the lives of the poor and the ordinary, and an adoption of brighter colours that signified an Indian essence to her. However, despite these conscious choices, in life and formal artistic expression, she was marked by her hybridity. National identity was to forever remain a personal quest. Sher-Gil's nation was no imagined community; it was yet another experiment in authenticating her sense of self.

Yashodhara Dalmia's biography is a rich tribute to the life of an extraordinary artist and an unusual woman. One hopes that this will be the beginning of new research on Amrita Sher-Gil that would forefront an analysis of her work as a part of revising the art historical tradition in India.■

Reference

[1] Geeta Kapur has argued that by the time of Amrita Sher-Gil's death in 1941 India was at "the threshold of what one may call primary formulations of modernism." *When Was Modernism in Indian Art*, Journal of Arts and Ideas, No. 27-28, March 1995, p.107.

[2] Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art and Society*, Thames and Hudson, 1996, p.10.

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Indian Art in Words and Images

Parul Dave Mukherji

DICTIONARY OF INDIAN ART & ARTISTS
By Pratima Sheth
Mapin Pulishers, Ahmedabad, 2006, pp. 400, Rs. 1995.00

A lavishly produced book on Indian art, *Dictionary of Indian Art & Artists* fills up a lacuna within the study of Indian art. Although the entries for contemporary Indian art are informative and exhaustive this book aims to reach back to the past as much as possible within the constraint of a dictionary format and also offers elucidation of technical terms concerning art practice. The ambitious scope of the enterprise is encapsulated by the book jacket that conjures up a collage of images from the past juxtaposed against a typical modernist painting by an abstract artist: a statue of the Sarnath Buddha and an Ajanta *Boddhisattva* jostle against a *Dasavatara* Ganjifa and a female figure by Hemendranath Mazumdar.

If one were to browse through the book, the interspersing of the words and images can cast a mesmerizing hold on one's attention and the high quality of the reproduction cannot help evoking one's admiration. Containing 1700 entries with 320 visuals in colour and black and white, emphasis on the verbal and the visual appears very balanced and carefully laid out. However, the subtitle which reads more like an afterthought – "including Technical Art Terms" in fact, constitutes an important dimension of the dictionary. For a general reader, the explication of technical terminology pertaining to the visual arts can be of great help in facilitating an easier entry into the works of art through a better understanding of the methods and material employed by the artists.

The very project of compiling a dictionary of Indian art and artists is extremely viable and important. But it appears that the author aspires to move towards two opposite directions: a. to offer basic information about various art traditions, movements, art institutions, artists and technical terms following the logic of the alphabetical order and b. to focus on evolution and context for Indian art bringing in the chronological order. It was intriguing to find two essays, one by Aban Amroliwalla and Radha Kumar titled 'Glimpses of the Evolution of Indian Art' and the other by Partha Mitter on 'Art, Nation and Identity: Colonial India—The First Phase' which are to act as a prelude to the dictionary. As the dictionary ends, the author places an article by O.P. Agarwal on 'Preservation of Art Objects' where one normally expects a conclusion.

It seems that the author imposes on the format of a dictionary that of a book with the two essays at the beginning and another at the end to frame the dictionary so that what she perceives as a lack is somehow supplemented. With the kind of remarkable research and documentation that has fed into the dictionary, the framework of the latter should have sufficed. The middle section constituting the dictionary proper stands on its own, hardly in need of a historical contextualization that the author feels compelled to insert. So while the context should have been central to the principle of organizing the dictionary, here it appears to be appended from the outside in the form of these essays.

Given the thrust of the dictionary towards modern and contemporary Indian art, the attempt to encompass a vaster time frame from 'Ajanta to Yantra' is not sustained by the entries. In fact, the wide net cast by the author over such a broad art historical terrain seems to be rather forceful intending to capture not only the whole history of Indian art since prehistoric times but also the speculative realm of traditional Indian aesthetics. This, however, may be seen as instructive for the lay reader but the ambition to be all inclusive with a special emphasis on the Indian context lands the author in a very tricky situation and detracts from the avowed aim of "providing factual information and explanation" and of avoiding any "attempt at qualitative evaluation". Contemporary Indian perspective is most relevant in understanding Indian modernism, but when its search compels the author to single-mindedly look for Indian counterparts for every western movement, the outcome leads to awkward comparisons. Take, as for instance, the entry for *Arte Povera* which was a specifically European movement is taken in the technical sense of mixed media and Indian artists like Balbir Singh Katt and Vasudha Thozur are said to exemplify the movement in India ! Again, *Rasa* and *Rasalila* follow one another alphabetically. Even keeping aside the theoretical problem of drawing a line of continuity between the traditional concepts of *rasa* and contemporary art practice, we are left wondering as to why the former finds embodiment in the works of contemporary artists whereas in the case of *Rasalila*, no specific names of artists are listed. This seems to raise the question of consistency and contradicts the guiding principle employed by the author.

Even more puzzling is the inclusion of Mesopotamian and Greek art within the dictionary of Indian art and artists, on grounds that there exists some links between the former and a contemporary artist Saroj Gogi Pal's works. To which one is apt to question the exclusion of Dhruva Mistry's works under the same entry. Does invocation of a particular tradition by an artist warrant an entry in the dictionary ? Does every mention of a technique such as 'silhouette' call for a list of Indian artists who employ it? Clearly this is a case of conflating a formal feature or a technique with a style.

If the author had focused only on Indian art from the colonial to postcolonial times, the logic of inclusion would have been better justified and a lot of arbitrary moves avoided. An important arena of popular visual culture remains ignored that had inspired many a contemporary artist. While the tremendous effort that has gone into the making of the dictionary has to be appreciated, particularly the author's careful inclusion of early 20th century women artists and some male modernist artists from regions largely ignored in modern art historiography, the problem lies in the very conceptualization of a dictionary and its claims of absolute neutrality and distance from theoretical speculation. It is less important to be all comprehensive and more crucial to accept a minimum degree of theorization that is inevitable in a project such as this. A dictionary need not make a pretension of a book for it can stand on its own if its organizational principle is clearly articulated.■

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Book News **Book News**

Like The Flowing River: Thoughts And Reflections by Paul Coelho, author of *The Alchemist*, and translated from the Portuguese by Margaret Jull Costa is an intimate collection of his reflections and short stories --powerful tales of living and dying, of destiny and choice, of love lost and found.
HarperCollins Publishers, 2005, pp. 232, Rs. 295.00

The Betrayal And Other Stories by Sivasankari, translated in English by Ameeta Agnihotri and Geetha Radhakrishnan, is a collection which crosses language and media barriers to touch a chord in the reader.
East West Books (Madras), 2006, pp. 230, Rs. 150.00

In A Forest, A Deer: Stories by Ambai, translated from the Tamil by Lakshmi Holmstrom, are deeply moving tales which constantly reinvent the short story form; interweaving lives, juxatoposing the past and the present, the mythical and the contemporary, articulating women's experiences and communicating their silences in words and images.
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 207, Rs. 295.00

Interpreting An Ouvre

Annapurna Garimella

ALTERNATE LYRICISM: JEHANGIR JANI
Edited by Ratnottama Sengupta
Mapin Publishing and Grantha Corporation, Ahmedabad, 2006,
pp. 120, Rs. 1500.00

Alternate Lyricism is a confused mélange of essays written for Jehangir Jani's different shows and some composed specifically for this publication. Contributors include Shivaji Panikkar, Ranjit Hoskote, Nancy Adjania, Mortimer Chatterjee, Girish Shahane, Anupa Mehta and Deeptha Achar. The essays have been gathered by Ratnottama Sengupta, whose own contribution is an interview with Jani.

Jehangir Jani is an interesting artist. His works traverse a range of materials, formats and issues. This book has works which date from 1991 when he had his first show to works from 2005. Throughout, Jani's work has focused on discussions of alternate sexuality (particularly gay), religion (particularly Islamic and Hindu practices), figuration and the materiality of art. His work is rich, always offering the seduction of the work as the context for analysis and advocacy. The book amply provides the reader with a sense of the sumptuousness of Jani's oeuvre; there are no blurred lines and dull images which induce glumness and disinterest in the reader though the design appears to be rushed and executed without much nuance or forethought. In terms of practical use, the editor has not taken care to include a list of Jani's works with dates, sizes and location or a calendar of his exhibitions and projects. When writers discuss specific works in their essays, often those images are not provided. Instead, reproductions of the function as punctuation between essays rather than as forms which engage iters in a dialogue. In effect, this disjunction between image and text ontributes to the monologic tone of much of the essays.

The lackadaisical quality of design continues in the book's essays. To start with, editing this book seems to mean gathering various essays and conducting an interview. There is no introductory essay in which Sengupta takes on the task of writing a history for Jani's art nor does she gather and thematize the various perspectives in the book so that the reader has some sense of how the Indian art world positions and interprets Jani's art. The individual writers too seem more interested in presenting their interpretative skills rather than doing the hard work of historicizing and critiquing art. Sentences such "Jehangir Jani's protagonists inhabit a Foucaltian (*sic*) world, where desire and power face off without any apparent mediatory possibilities"[1] and "not only does it (Jani's work) oblige us to face the discomfiting reality of death, and the uncertainty of resurrection, but it also throws our pieties into confusion by interweaving death with beauty, the elegiac with the sensuous"[2] beg several questions which are left completely unaddressed.

What is Jani's engagement with French poststructuralist philosophy, especially Foucault? Who is this "we" which has "pieties" and what are they? Where in the history of modern and contemporary art should Jani's engagement with death and sexuality, not unusual for at least the last two centuries, be located? Such questions need to be addressed; otherwise Jani and his work become susceptible to romanticization and estrangement from the long history of art of which the artist is very conscious of in his practice. For example, one writer calls him a "Sufi who knows the paths of revelation are often mapped through the terrain of seeming lunacy"[3] while another claims that his art is an "abstract poetry of detachment through which he tells his own modern fables of sexual transgression and cultural identity".[4] Statements such as these glorify the work and Jani's artistic agency without undergoing the labour of justifying such claims through research. The art critic once having chosen to identify Jani's work as transgressive (which it has potential to be), he or she must then discuss whose values are being transgressed and under which circumstances. This is a crucial line of inquiry since it is hard to really view most art as transgressive when it is seen by so few and in such rarefied spaces as galleries and exhibitions. Alternatively, another perspective, one more internal to the art world, may provide more fruitful interpretations. Jani's work is not in either a sexual or a religious closet; with playful seriousness, it openly borrows from the past, criticizes the present and lauds its own existence. Have not the conditions for such visibility improved today as mainstream secularist agendas and acceptance of mainstream homosexuality have become the norm in the art market? Taking this observation, it becomes possible to discuss why Jani's art manages to enter the spaces of high art which often become conservative when sexualities and minority religiosities are asserted too strongly or combine in unsafe ways.[5] These are issues which must be examined within the context of the rapacious and over-capitalized market of Indian art. Works, especially those which overtly observe and document questions of identity, are desirable objects for collectors and curators both here and abroad. But not all identities are equal; art criticism should help us understand why.

Because there is a failure to address such issues, Jani's professional identity in this publication seems more or less reduced to his personal biography. The social inequities and identity crises faced by minorities, sexual or religious, in India are being documented and protested systemactically by affected minority groups and people who feel solidarity with them. Art criticism which fails to do the necessary work of contextualizing work such as Jani's within the growing LBGT movement or changing class attitudes towards homosexuality relegate him effectively to a thinly populated world of martyrs and heroes who through some unknown factors develop the agency to question and act. One writer sees in Jani's work a critical interrogation of class relations between male clients and male and transgendered prostitutes, but then makes remarkably little effort to marry this observation to sustained visual analysis.[6] Instead, she unconsciously uses words like "lament" which invoke lost causes and people, even though many individuals and groups are engaged publicly and privately in active struggles.

Scholars often seek activist spaces. They also try to perform activist work through scholarship. Both these efforts, like all complex endeavours, meet with mixed success. All sorts of structural, disciplinary and organizational issues constrain the best of intentions. Attempts to identify professional practice which thrives in privileged spaces with problems faced by minority communities must rigorously ask the following question. Whom does the display of solidarity benefit and how?

Reference

1 Girish Shahane, 'Marked by Restraint', *Alternate Lyricism:Jehangir Jani*, ed. Ratnottama Sengupta (Ahmedabad: Mapin Publishing, 2006), p. 57.
2 Ranjit Hoskote, 'The Dancer in the Tomb: Jehangir Jani's Transgressive Gesture', Ibid, p.45.
3 Ibid and similarly Shivaji Panikkar, 'Critical Interfaces in Jehangir Jani's Artistic Explorations', Ibid, p.11.
4 Nancy Adjania, 'Religious Scores, New-Age Techno Cultures and Museal Tales', Ibid, p.51.
5 Recent controversies over Hussain and other artists and the complex relationship the art system has to these works indicate that relationship between art, activism and the market is not easy or without compromises.
6 Anupa Mehta, 'Sculpted Watermarks: *An Alternate Lyricism*', *Alternate Lyricism:Jehangir Jani*, ed. Ratnottama Sengupta (Ahmedabad: Mapin Publishing, 2006), p.106.

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Positioning Indian Art in a Global Market

Deptha Achar

FRANCIS NEWTON SOUZA: BRIDGING WESTERN AND INDIAN MODERN ART
By Aziz Kurtha
Mapin Publishing, Ahmedabad, 2006, Simultaneously published in the United States of America by Grantha Corporation, New Jersey, 2006, pp. 212 pages with 200 color and 61 b/w plates, price not stated.

The recent publication of Aziz Kurtha's *Francis Newton Souza: Bridging Western and Indian Modern Art* is perhaps unsurprising in a context where prices of modern Indian art generally are constantly reaching ever more spectacular levels both nationally and elsewhere. Certainly, one of the key objectives of the book is to offer an art market perspective to the art collector, the many asides with reference to ownership, signature and prices are a clue to these concerns. Indeed, the title itself can be read as an index of the manner in which Indian art is being positioned in a global market. Yet, the book is timely also in another sense – it underlines the urgent need for new critical reassessments of modern Indian art.

Even a casual look at bibliographies on Souza, even the one appended to the book under review, indicates that most of the serious writing on Souza was published decades ago, contemporary catalogue essays are also not quite plentiful. Most websites mainly carry obituaries of the painter or dated accounts of his work rather than any systematic or critical description (see, for example, http://www.fnsouza.net/about.htm). This book, then, could have been the much needed and long overdue book length study of Souza. However, it fails to do justice to its subject, at least partly because the framework that it adopts is more suited to the requirements of an (international) art market than art historical/critical analysis.

The first part of the book is mainly biographical, the opening chapter 'Origin and Influence' gives us a sketch of Souza's life and education, and, through an account of influences on and relations to his work, some idea of the 'development' of his art practice as well. The second chapter is organized in a chronology, moving from the nineteen fifties and sixties in London to the late sixties shift to New York to the nineties when Souza's visits to India became increasingly regular. The rest of the book offers formalist readings of his work ('Idiom and Expression' and 'Line and Language') and ends with a collection of critical writings, mostly laudatory and fairly dated, of his artwork. Apart from the bibliography mentioned earlier, there is also a detailed chronology of his work: this clearly is of value to the art historian and collector alike.

Although he aims "to reflect upon F.N. Souza's life and work for its true import", there are few significantly new insights to be found in Kurtha's readings of Souza's work. However, liberally scattered through the text one finds extensive quotations from hard to locate(or access) sources such as contemporary newspaper reviews of Souza's London shows, early catalogue essays and personal letters and communications from Souza himself; these are of considerable historical and critical interest. Kurtha draws substantially from these as well as from Geeta Kapur's sadly out of print *Contemporary Indian Artists* (1978) to offer a mosaic of critical opinions on Souza. Suffice it to say that the thrust of his account goes to reinforce the aura that has gone to "achieve" prices that are "truly staggering both in terms of records for Indian contemporary art as also for displaying the prowess of a new breed of Indian art collectors" (p.212).

What is spectacular about the book, however, are the artworks themselves. There are over 200 color plates, most of them are large reproductions; as Kurtha mentions, "Most of Souza's works in this book have not been seen publicly" (p.9). The image dominated book does seem to predispose it towards a certain coffee table readership (viewership?), but the power and range of Souza's images does not let the book pass into this legion. Erotic, perverse, satiric, scathing, the works resist the genteel, decorous gaze. These are works that cannot be framed in the ambience of the elegant.

Kurtha recognizes the arresting and subversive power of the visuals; his attempt is to "imbue viewing with understanding" by loading "extensive captions… under most of the images" (p.9). His captions mainly offer a reading in terms of formal qualities and artistic influences, critical opinion, information relating the work to personal details about the artist's life and Souza's writings on art. The captions often carry a heavy load of gratuitous detail, for most part they work against the grain of unabashedly erotic or savagely satiric work; to cite a random example, his long caption of the deeply ironic 'The Politicians' concludes with this: "Moreover, the angry facial features on the left (sic) seem to be dribbling at the mouth and flowing over the large cape-like garment that is worn" (p.78).

Far more suggestive are Souza's own writings; and the Appendix with Souza's 'Fragment of an Autobiography' (1952) is one of the high points of the book. This piece, along with others collected in *Words and Lines* (London: Villiers, 1959) had established Souza as a writer of some power. It is stunning to read today the self assurance and the intimacy with which Souza can claim the 'influence' of the visual imagery of the Church: "not its dogmas but its grand architecture and the splendour of its services. The priest dressed in richly embroidered vestments…. The wooden saints painted with gold and bright colours staring vacantly out of their niches." Souza's position as an 'Indian' artist is in question here: the nomenclature 'Indian' then (and perhaps even now), surely must have been a mark that denoted a sharply delineated difference from the West, such a casual acknowledgement of a common visual heritage must have unsettled those assumptions. One would have wished that 'Nirvana of a Maggot' (1953) whose publication led his major show at Gallery One in 1955, and this is mentioned by Kurtha, had also been included in the book. It is here that he explores the career of western aesthetic traditions in India.

Edwin Mullins has perceptively noted as much in his early monograph on Souza: "Souza is an Indian, yet to explain away his paintings in terms of an Indian tradition is to explain it away. (He) was educated in a Bombay that was "more Victorian than Victoria," as he describes it, and whose intelligentsia thought more highly of Royal Academy bluebell woods than their own mighty sculptures of Khajuraho. If one looks for the true roots of Souza's art one must look towards Rouault and Picasso, and more particularly towards Spanish and Portuguese Byzantine imagery, which made up a deep impression on him in the small Catholic enclave of Goa where he was brought up."[1] While Kurtha does mark the influence of Roman Catholicism on Souza he has generally shied away from examining its implications for a re-imagining of modernity in art.

Souza's role as the founder member of the Progressive Art Group is undisputed and his influence on the shape of modern Indian art is profound. While Kurtha is concerned with tracking influences *on* Souza, he spends little time in looking at the influence he exercised on the group that he founded. In spite of describing M.F. Hussain's acknowledgement of Souza as his mentor (p.7), he does not pursue this line of analysis. In the context of his work on modernity in Indian art – he has co-authored *Art of Modern India* with Balraj Khanna – this lacuna is puzzling. In particular, Souza's energetic articulation of the idea of the artist in contemporary Indian society, its conception of modernity and its impact on the artists who followed is waiting to be examined afresh. Indeed, one continues to wait for a serious book length study on Souza.

To come back to the visual; if there is a single reason to acquire the book, it is for the collection of images that have been brought together. The book has been thoughtfully designed, and the reproductions are of excellent quality. We get to see Souza's early work done during his communist phase and the work of the 'Progressive' period; the focus is, however, on the extraordinary phase in the nineteen fifties and sixties, where suffering and savage images of Christ and Christian saints, erotic sometimes pornographic renderings of women, satirical and bitter caricatures of men of the world, crazy oppressive cityscapes make up Souza's celebrated repertoire. The 'chemical drawings'[2] that Souza developed in New York remain unrepresented; this may perhaps be in acknowledgement of the general consensus that these works are uninspired and weak. However, given the contemporary interest in media images and the question of citation, this might be the time to revaluate these works.■

References

[1] Edwin Mullins, *FN Souza: An Introduction*, London: Anthony Blond, 1962.
[2] Souza used chemicals to blur color spreads in glossy magazines; he subsequently worked over the bleached areas.

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Commercial Sex Workers of Bangladesh: Policies and Practices

Amena Mohsin & Saima Ahmed

A large number of women in Bangladesh are deprived of adequate access to their basic needs and live well below the poverty line. They are victims of gender inequities such as access to land, productive resources, information, skills and education. Many of them perform a variety of unpaid domestic tasks and informal agricultural activities. Even when employed in the formal sector, they get lower wages and are subject to gender discrimination, and sexual harassment. Often over-population, environmental degradation or natural disasters cause scarcity of employment, and many women with the burden of ensuring their families' survival are compelled to move to other places for jobs. Numerous reasons such as these force thousands of women to leave their home and communities to seek an alternative livelihood for meeting their basic needs and add to their family income.

Women are usually marginalized and often stigmatized for such unfortunate incidents as rape, sexual abuse, divorce, or widowhood. Out of desperation or sheer poverty they accept the offer of whoever promises them a job or a prosperous life. Since women of our tradition bound society are less exposed to the outside world, they easily become victims of deception and quite often end up in brothels, street prostitution, forced prostitution, or fall prey to trafficking.

Reliable statistics on prostitutes are unavailable in Bangladesh. The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics does not recognize prostitution as an occupation and enumerates sex workers as "destitute". It is estimated that there are over 150,000 prostitutes in the country at present.[1] About 10,000-20,000 young women and girls are trafficked annually to India, Pakistan, Bahrain, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.).[2]

Those who are compelled to take up prostitution both within and outside the country suffer from extreme sexual exploitation and violation of human rights. Many, particularly the child prostitutes go through a seasoning process where they are tortured and repeatedly raped by numerous men. Almost all of them become prisoner of a never-ending sexual slavery, earn low income, and are deprived of a sustainable livelihood.

Law in Bangladesh does not allow the under eighteens to work as prostitutes and prohibits any kind of forced prostitution, trafficking, and harassment, and considers sexual abuse of underage girls as criminal offence with provision of severe punishment, including death penalty. A woman of eighteen or above who voluntarily decides to engage in this profession has to collect affidavits signed by notary public or magistrate that confirm her age and voluntary acceptance of the profession of prostitution. However, this is neither a permit for prostitution nor an acknowledgement of any legal right of the prostitutes. Application of this legal provision is rather elusive and practically meaningless since most brothel owners manipulate affidavits for minor girls. Moreover, birth registration is not a legal requirement and nobody really goes for registering births, and therefore, the ascertaining age of the prospective sex workers is done arbitrarily.

This paper aims at discussing Bangladesh's national policies that so far have been unable to address serious violations of rights that surround sex work.

Social rejection: Once women and children are traded into the sex market, it becomes impossible for them to go back to their previous life. Public opinion characterizes them as immoral criminals, impure, and 'fallen'.

Prostitutes are viewed with such disrespect that society does not accept them in the common localities. They are always marginalized in the state system and the development process, and have the least participation and access to political, social and cultural activities. They are even denied their religious rites of burial. Their children are also denied citizenship rights, and face social rejection since they do not have their fathers' name. They cannot go to school and mix with other people out of shame for their mother's profession.

In recent times, we have seen researchers, human rights activists, scholars, lawyers, policy makers, and the sex workers themselves battling over the issue of recognizing prostitution as work and providing them workers' as well as citizens' rights.

On the one hand, it is argued that we cannot consider prostitution a profession given the amount of exploitation and violation of human rights involved in this. Even if we recognize prostitution as work, we will actually legitimize that women are at the service of men, and accept the exploitation of women's body by men. We will legitimize the commodification of women's body as well. On the other hand, it is argued that since prostitutes live by selling their bodies in exchange for money, there is a demand for their service. Huge money is transacted through sex trade where the pimps, the landlords, the tenants, and the prostitutes—everyone gets their share of income for their services. It is argued that we should, therefore, recognize prostitution as work and prostitutes as workers.

Here we need to realize that it is absolutely meaningless for the prostitutes whether we recognize them as workers or not, because they have no alternative but to sell their bodies for a living. The legal status of prostitutes in Bangladesh depends on whether the adult prostitutes voluntarily chose their profession, or whether the minors are forced for prostitution. But it is very difficult to claim that any prostitute in Bangladesh chose her profession without any social or economic or any other pressure.

Confusing laws and imprudent policies: Contradictory and often unclear legislation have created such loopholes in the law-enforcement system of Bangladesh that the traffickers, the pimps and those involved in sexual exploitation of women get away with their crimes and operate with complete impunity. The existing structure helps the state to establish control over the sexuality of women and get the maximum benefit from the business.

In 2000, the Bangladesh High Court ruled that prostitution as a livelihood is not illegal. It made Bangladesh one of the few Islamic countries which do not ban prostitution. But in practice, the prostitutes here receive little support from the laws because of the ambiguous nature of their profession. However, according to the Penal Code of 1860, soliciting for prostitution in public places is a penal offence in our country.[3] This law also provides punishments for kidnapping, abduction, slavery, forced labor, confinement, rape, and selling or buying minors for prostitution.

It is an irony that the Constitution of Bangladesh has put gambling and prostitution in the same category and says that the state shall take all necessary actions to prevent both (Article 18, Section II). This indeed is insensitive and gendered. Gambling is an act that people do out of fun, while prostitution for the prostitute is a matter of livelihood and sheer survival. Though the High Court ruling of 2000 recognizes prostitution as a livelihood and is not illegal, the police always pick up prostitutes wherever they find them and put them in jail under the Penal Code of 1860, or under the Metropolitan Police Ordinance of 1976.

The Dhaka Metropolitan Police Ordinance 1976 states that if anyone solicits for the purpose of prostitution by any word or gesture or by indecent physical exposures in any public place, or in the vicinity of public place, then the person will be accounted for punishment. There is also provision for punishment for hampering public interest in Section 290 of the Penal Code of Bangladesh. The police interpret the practice of prostitution as against public interest. The Criminal Penal Code (1898) contains a provision of public nuisance where it is stated that if the occupation or business of anyone harms public health or creates unpleasant environment in public life, then the person involved in such occupation shall receive punishment. The police utilize this rule as well against prostitution by referring it as public nuisance; though it does not directly refer to the prostitutes.

The Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act of 1933 provides criminal penalties and punishment to those who detain a girl under eighteen for prostitution against her will, or procure, provide, or encourage her for

prostitution. The Act prohibits the landlords, tenants and the brothel owners to provide their houses for the purpose of prostitution. It also provides punishment for those who keep, manage or assist in running a brothel and those who live or depend on the earning of a prostitute. The Act allows prostitution of girls above eighteen but prohibits their work in public places. Section VII of the Act makes it explicit that it will impose *penalty for the person who solicits or molests any person for the purposes of prostitution in street or public places or within the sight of which can be seen or heard from any street or public place.*[4]

The 1933 Act created a legal confusion in the country. It made the practice of prostitution illegal in the brothel and in public places. But at the same time it has allowed women above eighteen to practise prostitution. It does not say anything on where these women are going to carry out their work. The police act according to the Penal Code of 1860 and Section VII of the 1933 Act and the prostitutes face detention, arrest, eviction from brothels as it has happened in *Kandupatti* and *Tanbazaar*.[5] A large number of sex workers were scattered all over the city. Since no one was rehabilitated, many evicted sex workers were forced to continue their practice on the streets or in parks.

The state policy toward prostitution has also been ambiguous. On the one hand it created laws to limit the practice of prostitution, on the other hand, the constitution says every individual has the right to choose his/her profession. The exclusion of prostitutes from society started from the colonial times and still the state and the elites of society tend to 'territorialize' or confine prostitutes in red light zones. Most of the brothels in Bangladesh do not even get water and electricity supply. The prostitutes buy them at a much higher price. Prostitutes have always been perceived as diseased, filthy and vice by the state. The state provided attention on the health conditions of the prostitutes only when it felt threatened by a possible spread of HIV or other sexually transmitted diseases. But there are ample unregistered street prostitutes who remain outside the purview of such services. The state has never felt any actual need to take initiative for a sustainable livelihood for the prostitutes, rather it has denied them human rights, human values, and justice.

In 1981 a state embargo was imposed on female migration of unskilled and semi-skilled workers for overseas employment on the grounds that the dignity of women will be jeopardized. Faced with extreme poverty, many Bangladeshi women then tried to go abroad illegally. This provided ample opportunity for the traffickers to traffic large number of Bangladeshi women abroad and put them into brothels. As those trafficked women were living illegally, they could not ask for any legal protection from those states. In 1988 the government decided to consider migration of semi-skilled and unskilled women on a case by case basis. In 1997 the government again imposed a ban on women migration except for highly qualified professionals. One can make a case for the government and argue that the policies were aimed at salvaging the women from exploitation once they were abroad, but the fact remains that the state did not provide these women with alternative means of livelihood. The state also could not effectively check trafficking despite having passed laws, since often the law enforcing agencies were part of this trafficking group.

Conclusion: In Bangladesh, there is a lack of effective legislation. The policies and institutional structures that enforce the laws are corrupt and ineffective; and the public expenditures and basic economic and social services exclude the poor and the vulnerable such as women and indigenous people. If policies do not guarantee equity and provide easy access to social and economic services and resources, the poor and the vulnerable groups as well as individuals will never get the chance to be empowered.

In addition to the existence of better legislation, government policies should ensure the capacity of the state to give protection to the poor and vulnerable against criminal acts such as trafficking, forced prostitution, sexual exploitation and violation of human rights.

In Bangladesh many people are denied access to such protection. Those women, who are suffering the most because of trafficking and forced sexual services, are not even aware of their rights. They do not report cases to the police either in fear that the perpetrators would do more harm to them or because of stigmatization. Even when cases are reported, deep-rooted corruption in the law enforcement and judicial system create more suffering.

The government, therefore, should take measures to eliminate all forms of corruption and misconduct of the law enforcement agencies in providing affidavits to the prostitutes, and ensure access to all the legal, economic and social services that the state is supposed to provide to them as citizens.

It has become necessary that all contradictions and ambiguities in the laws on prostitution should end. The High Court judgment of 2000 (about the sex workers) should be drafted as a law to address many of the civil rights of the prostitutes. A new law has to be formulated that would decriminalize prostitutes so that they are no longer sentenced to jail for their practice or face any kind of harassment.

The government never took effective measures to rehabilitate sex workers. There have been some efforts at the NGO level, but it is very difficult to rehabilitate them in our society where we regard them as immoral and do not dignify their profession. Therefore, instead of trying to provide them employment, the NGOs and international donor agencies as well as the government can provide them capital in small amounts to start a business of their own where income can be generated and they will attain self sufficiency.

Moreover, policies need to be directed at sensitizing the public about the problems faced by the prostitutes to bring about change in their attitude against prostitution and the social stigma that surrounds their work. Only social mobilization can give them recognition as professionals and incorporate them in society as human beings.

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[5] In 1999, the Government of Bangladesh evicted the prostitutes from the country's two largest brothels:Tan Bazar and Kandupotti. The rehabilitation of these sex workers as promised by the Government never took place.

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Locating Women In A Matrix

Maithreyi Krishnaraj

CAPABILITIES, FREEDOM AND EQUALITY: AMARTYA SEN'S WORK FROM A GENDER PERSPECTIVE
Edited by Bina Agarwal, Jane Humphries and Ingrid Robeyns
Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2006, Rs. 795.00

The book examines critically Sen's contribution to some fundamental issues of human welfare from a gender perspective. Sen, has displayed feminist sensibilities, rare among economists. His ideas on notions such as justice, freedom, social choice, agency, 'functionings', and capability as a set of philosophical categories have not only enriched our understanding but has given us a whole new vocabulary and evaluative tools for judging human development, values that should underpin our goals. Firstly, he shifted the focus from the conventional approach of aggregating individual preferences, which are subjective evaluations ignoring the situations in which people live, to interactive processes that determine outcomes—the extent of participation of agents in decision making. Secondly, departing from the exclusive focus on wealth and utilities, he has made us recognize that ultimately what matters is what kind of life we can lead, what enables us to pursue the goals we value.

The editors have done a commendable job in their introduction, elucidating Sen's main ideas, and how they can be fruitfully used for analysis of women's location in the gender matrix of society. After the introduction, the volume carries articles by Fabienne Peter, Ingrid Rubeyn, Vegard Iversen, Des Gasper and Irene van Staveren Marainne T. Hill and Martha Nussbaum. These essays originally appeared in special issues of the journal *Feminist Economics* published by the International Association of Feminist Economics in 2000. The volume also includes some important works of Sen as well as the editors conversations with Sen. In his latest work Sen has defined development as a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy and this can be achieved by removing the major sources of unfreedom, such as poverty, tyranny, poor economic opportunities as well as systematic social deprivation, neglect of public facilities and intolerance of repressive states. Freedom is not merely a primary end of development but also its principal means. Sen enunciated five instrumental freedoms: political, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency guarantees and protective security. Sen does not ignore the role of social values, prevailing mores in influencing gender equity, nature of child care, family size, fertility patterns, treatment of environment among a host of others.

What really then are 'gender' critques? The following remarks by the authors in the volume present some of them. Robeyn points out that Sen underspecifies 'capability'. Freedom which he supports is over extended—

The book examines critically Sen's contribution to some fundamental issues of human welfare from a gender perspective. Sen, has displayed feminist sensibilities, rare among economists.

it can only be one value among others. For me, reading the book, I feel, he does not give enough credence to the trade offs that women routinely do in the interest of domestic peace. Paid work outside which Sen argues increases agency may not be such a boon if we look at the terms and conditions of work, the sacrifice of leisure and rest that it often involves given the sexual division of labour. Thus we have to acknowledge different dimensions of well being. He defines agency as 'ability to set and pursue one's own goals and interests of which the pursuit of one's own well being may be only one'. Feminist writers in the volume point out that 'given the complex interdependencies that operate in a society tying together the lives of different people, it may be impossible to isolate the environment sufficiently to guarantee that each has all the controls over his or her personal life' What about the ethic of care which overrides individual goals?

Nussbaum argues that secure rights in terms of capabilities require positive discrimination in the case of women. Gender justice is impossible without limiting male freedom. How do we rule out conflicts? Freedom has to deal with issues of justice. While acknowledging that Sen's capability approach rejects normative evaluation based on commodities, income and resources and instead gives recognition to the fact that people differ in their abilities to convert resources into capabilities she maintains that Sen's approach underspecifies 'capability' Agarwal contends that for applying his concept to the gender question, one needs to know which capabilities are important. One needs therefore more explicit formulation, methodological justification, sensitivity to context, different levels of generalization, and exhaustion/non-reduction . To Iversen individual opportunities for capability cannot address social causes of poverty and inequality because he fails to locate the origin of rights and freedoms in social relations of dominance and subordination. The limitation in Sen according to Hill treats entitlements of individuals as confined to which institutions affect exchange entitlement whereas in reality well being of individual household members is constrained by power relations between genders. 'Social institutions and practices are forms of cooperative behaviour that result in the reproduction of .social relations over time' After all, every society rests on shared customs, culture, religion, ideology and unspoken rules of behaviour with appended penalties and rewards. In articulating social choice competing social goals vie for attention.

Gasper offers some interesting comments. 'Different conception of what is available in life states and differences in judgements of what are constraints will lead to different assessments of the degree of freedom that a person enjoys. A woman may be free from legal constraints on entering public activity but is constrained by commitments to care for the old, young and infirm. Assessment of freedom will reflect whether her participation is considered important or whether care is seen as self fulfilling choice.' We can value some freedoms not others—freedom to pollute the environment, buy political influence are not what we would support. In hierarchical politics affluent people's freedoms take precedence. I would add that organized power blocks operate in society like for example the builder mafia or other entrenched groups to limit the scope for individual freedom for others which cannot be eliminated without public action. What about the value of friendship or respect?

All in all the editors offer a stimulating discourse on capability and freedom from a gender lens. A worthy read.■

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Gods That Failed

Jasodhara Bagchi

WOMEN, DEVELOPMENT, AND THE U.N.: A SIXTY-YEAR QUEST FOR EQUALITY AND JUSTICE
By Devaki Jain. Foreword by Amartya Sen
Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2005, pp. 230, price not mentioned.

As we stand five years from 9/11 blasts and the impotence of the UN in face of the neo-imperialist crackdown on Afghanistan, Iraq and now Lebanon in the name of combating terror, one is left wondering: where have all the promises like the 'peace tents' gone? How much of thinking that was garnered by the wonderful, hard-working, heroic women within the UN will be of use to the starving, illiterate, trafficked, HIV-AIDS infected millions of women across the globe? How effectively will the UN based democracy stand upto this ghastly challenge?

In his Foreword Professor Amartya Sen has rightly celebrated Devaki Jain's refusal to take up the theme of her book in a minimalist framework of a tedious chronological regurgitation of what Charles Dickens would call 'facts, facts and facts'. Instead, we have been offered a rich narrative of development, a history of women's movement worldwide, its dreams, challenges and fissures, bringing alive a distant policy-making body like the United Nations, jiving with development refracted through the world's women. The task, as Professor Sen points out, was an onerous one and one, moreover, made more so by the stringent standards set by the author herself. The issues were never allowed to be oversimplified, nor did the massive amount of primary data uncovered permitted to clog the flow of the argument. The expectations of readability raised in the Foreword is not allowed to flag for a moment.

The author has used her vast expertise in the area to the best of advantages. This has got interestingly translated in the way the sixty-year trajectory has been mapped. The Introduction tries to capture an overview of the terrain, without, if I may say so, spoiling the sense of discovery that each successive plot has in store for us. Jain's early years of apprenticeship in Ruskin College and St. Anne's College in Oxford and the experience of working with Gunar Myrdal got reflected in her organization of the first twenty years of the UN as a hard battle for inscribing equality between men and women into the agenda of the United Nations. What has emerged as an issue of interest to me is the way women's claims over equality, as her entitlements in the entire developmental process have been made to meet the reverse process, viz. equality's claims over women's equitable share in the developmental process. The dialogic nature of this negotiation, however imperfect the dialogue might have been, has made the narrative etched by Devaki Jain so compelling. A global organization built on the ruins of a World War that had to steer through one after another of independent nation states born out of the ashes of colonial states, had a long way to go before women could emerge as a distinct category Devaki Jain's sure-footed traversing of the bumpy terrain lays bare, what she herself, rather dramatically calls 'A new constituency in UN politics called "women"' and paved 'the entry of a powerfully endowed idea called "women" in UN thought.' The book unfurls this complex process, more or less in decadal bloca, except for the first two decades which have been lumped under the rubric of 'setting the stage for equality'. Even at a distance of sixty years it is difficult to visualize the impact of a declaration by the United Nations that all women in the member states will be given equal political rights of voting! Beginning with something as simple and basic as this, the visibility of women in this massive global structure could only be traced through the embeddedness of the organizational structures, its interlinkages with the world politics and, later, the quagmire of macro-economic compulsions that often cut into the UN quest for justice, but which the organization itself was too impotent to contain. As outsiders to the entire policymaking framework some of us have known about the efforts of Eleanor Roosevelt in including women's rights into the agenda of the UN. However, thanks to Jain's insight into the nature of this particular quest, she has been able to bring coherence into this phase of somewhat inchoate data. As a result we now have access to the debates within which this effort was undertaken. Starting with the first small group of four who signed the founding document of the UN in the Charter Conference in San Francisco, which included three women from what later came to be called the Third World, viz. Dominican Republic, Brazil and China, the way this struggle to put equality for women as part of the major agenda of the UN developed in the first two decades is unfolded with gripping details and admirable clarity. Starting with women who had been active since the days of the League of Nations, some of whom even participated in the Lima Conference, it is fascinating to see how the work of the first Commission of the Status of Women progressed. The first Commission included, among others, Shareefa Hamid Ali from the A.I.W.C. representing India. One of the practices of the author that has made this intricate history reader-friendly, is the way the landmarks, specially in terms of personalities, have been showcased in boxes. It is interesting to note that Development has only a shadowy presence in this phase of UN's grappling with the 'woman question'.

It is only from the third decade of this account of UN's history, that the issue of 'development' emerges as a major player in defining UN's responsibility towards the women of the world. Here, very justly, Jain has hailed the pioneering book of Ester Boserup *Women' Role in Economic Development* as setting a trend in the UN which they had begun a little earlier with the CSW collaborating with the ILO to produce the *Declaration of Elimination of Discrimination against Women* particularly in the field of economic opportunities. As Jain concurs with the view that following on the wake of the celebration of the Women's International Year Boserup's book became a kind of fundamental text for the International Women's Decade.

Boserup's argument that women's inclusion in the modern sector of development accelerated economic growth was influential in the later sponsoring of development programmes including women by UN organizations such as the FAO, the UNDP and other agencies. Many of the international and bilateral donor agencies started development programmes for women.

Jain interestingly shows the way this new emergence of 'Development' as an area in which women's role needs to be integrated, added to the earlier search for equality. The International Conference on Women was preceded, as it always is, in other decades as well, by the World Conference on Population in Bucharest and the World Food Conference in Rome which brought out the centrality of women's role in both these areas. Though not free of the neo-Malthusian bias, we get to see how the efforts of Helvi Sipila paved the way for the UNFPA, the UN funding agency, to gradually tilt itself towards reproductive rights and choices. In this decade the UNESCO also came out with pro-women programmess, generating anthropological studies to buttress cultural arguments and questioning the determining of status of women by ignoring the local history and culture.

All this paved the way for the preparations for the International Women's Conference held in Mexico city in 1975.

Here I have a small bone to pick with the author of this magnificent book. Under the leadership of the just deceased Dr Phulrenu Guha and Dr Vina Mazumdar, India prepared a magnificent report *Towards Equality* that has been recognized as a 'founding text' by both academics and activists in the country.This was the palpable touch of the UN we had felt on our lives and practices. I was disappointed not to find this very important activity being left out of the 'Intellectual' history of the UN by an Indian feminist scholar. Dr Guha's name not occurring in the Index too is a lacuna.

The story of the first UN conference on Women in Mexico City, after which it was stretched to a decade, is narrated with a lot of clarity, of the issues that came up. What is interesting is the divide between the rich countries and the poor, in terms of prioritizing women's issues, which forms a major subtext in later argument. With the developed countries articulating their needs to address their own priorities, 'development' as seen from the countries that were aspiring to attain a just and equitable society, began to emerge as the priority area within the UN. As Jain puts it so tellingly:

> While for women from developed countries the issue that resonated most was equality, in most provinces of Kenya the priority was bringing water closer to home. (p.70)

The stage is thus set for the major theme that is at the core of this book, viz. development and its multiple challenges. As the key founder member of DAWN, i.e. Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era and as the convener of the founding group in Bangalore Devaki Jain gives special clarity and insight into this narration. Started as a preparation of women social scientists from across the globe for the ensuing World Conference, the group challenged the dominant development paradigm to inscribe the poor women across the globe , prioritizing their special needs as they struggled and survived .The analyses that emerged in the meetings held by the group was finally published as a book by Gita Sen and Karen Grown *Development Crises and Alternative Visions: Third World Women's Perspective (New York, Monthly Review Press, 1987)* used widely in universities and Development policy makers.

In many ways this chapter is the main hub of the book in which Devaki Jain articulates the zenith of the political possibilities that were available to women thinking about equality justice and peace that had been opened up with the UN. The political vista opened up by the nonaligned movement is explored by Devaki as a distinct possibility of dissenting space which had possibilities for women of the Third World.

As we leave the triumph of the Third World women in Nairobi Conference's *Forward Looking Strategy* Devaki Jain's narrative brings out, in no uncertain terms, the 'painful disjunction' between the consolidation of women's position within the UN, and the 'inequality, poverty and conflict and its injuries' that were rising' in the global arena in which 'women were the worst hit'. On the macro-economic issues Devaki Jain has made her position quite clear. The effects of the 'Washington Consensus' and the increasing role of the Bretton Woods institutions in global economic governance came down heavily on the UN role in negotiating economic justice, Since the UN operated through the states, the neoliberal paradigm that compelled the state to withdraw, meant lesser manouvring power for the UN. A Gandhian to the core, Devaki Jain has not shied away from diagnosing the negative impact of the crumbling of the Socialist Bloc that 'had supported approaches that required a strong state, a thrust towards public provision of basic services' and was 'often an ally of the newly liberated states as they attempted to forge coalitions such as the NAM or the Group of 77 to negotiate with their former colonial masters.

While these negative forces were at work Jain welcomes the emergence of the Human Development Indices as an alternative measurement of societal well-being. On the occasion of the International Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, that concluded the decade, the Human Development Report that was published and released at the Conference, was subtitled *Gender and Human Development*. The miserable inadequacies it pointed at helped to mobilize women through the next decade. This is also the time when an institution like SEWA (Self Employed Women's Association) worked towards an increased recognition of the informal sector as a powerful economic force. This is the decade which also saw what Devaki Jain graphically describes as architectural changes in the UN, that saw more of 'women-only spaces', such as the UNIFEM or the INSTRAW. Though not without reservations, more and more countries signed the Covenant of Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

While the Beijing Conference was, in some ways, an earth-shaking event, the eroding of women's opportunities and well-being at the ground level indicated the danger signals that marked the next decade that brings us to the present. The challenge of globalization, the growing poverty and inequality meant that a global organization like the UN had to devise what, after all, were damage-control measures to counteract the damages done to the women by the system in general. Micro-credit, for instance was touted about as a panacea for the inroads made by poverty on women's lives. Fighting for at least one-third participation of women in decision making bodies in governments is still on. International war tribunals to try the perpetrators in Rwanda and former Yugoslavia raised some hopes for justice for women across the globe which were quickly belied by more recent events.

As we stand five years from 9/11 blasts and the impotence of the UN in face of the neo-imperialist crackdown on Afghanistan, Iraq and now Lebanon in the name of combating terror, one is left wondering: where have all the promises like the 'peace tents' gone? How much of thinking that was garnered by the wonderful, hard-working, heroic women within the UN will be of use to the starving, illiterate, trafficked, HIV-AIDS infected millions of women across the globe? How effectively will the UN based democracy stand upto this ghastly challenge?

It is in the face of this current crisis that it is important to prise open the genuine struggles that are such an important aspect of the sixty-year history narrated so grippingly by Devaki Jain. The terrains in knowledge and action that have been gained cannot simply be wished away. The story also reinforces the need to think and act with conviction and innovation in view of the debris of poverty and conflict all around us. People's struggle for justice and equality is intensifying and women's struggle is central to it. It is important to remember the struggle for reclamation that women had put in through the instrumentaliy of a global body like the UN. We thank Devaki Jain for bringing to the fore the struggle and thinking that went into the changing contours of the debates on development in the women's movement worldwide .There appears to be more substance in it than the facile delaration of Millennium Development Goals would suggest.■

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Issues And Concerns

Ashish Bose

POVERTY, GENDER AND MIGRATION
Edited by Sadhna Arya and Anupama Roy
Women and Migration in Asia Series Vol. 2, Sage Publications, 2006,
pp. 261, Rs. 320.00

This volume comprises eleven contributions by scholars from Bangladesh, Canada, India, Nepal, Netherlands, Sri Lanka, U.K. and USA on diverse aspects of gender studies, the focus being on women who have adopted migration as a survival strategy. The message of this book is clear : poor women migrants are assets not only to their families but to their home country.

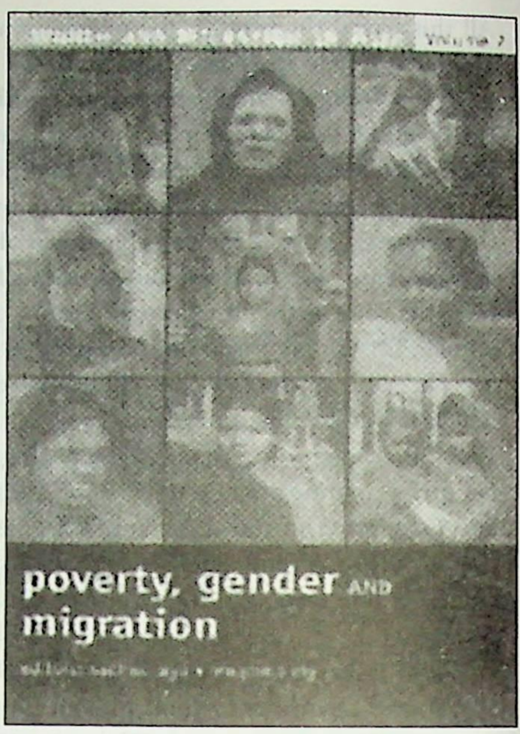
To quote Meenakshi Thapan, the general editor of the series : "the endeavour to publish these five volumes is a critical response to migration theories that have failed to take into consideration the gender aspect thereby failing to account for the complex experience of migrant women (p.9). In her competent summing up of theoretical and empirical issues involved in growing migration of women, and also the general perception of women migrations, she laments that "despite the rising number of female migrants, women are not given equal importance as compared to men in migration, since they are still not perceived as equal actors worthy of being accounted for" (p.9).

Sadhna Arya and Anupama Roy, the editors of this volume in their introductory chapter titled 'When poor women migrate : Unraveling issues and concerns' have very ably summarized the content of the papers. They point out that "the relationship between state policies and migration 'ecisions resonates in all papers in the volume. An underlying theme that ives together the papers that focus on internal migration is the shift in ivation patterns, and the manner in which it affects people's access to, ownership and relation with, land" (p.29). These papers also give thought o theoretical issues. As the editors point out, "Clearly, the growing structural inequalities in rural and tribal belts and the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few along with mechanization, deforestation and various development projects have forced women and men to move out in search of work for sheer survival" (p.29).

The chapters on Sri Lanka, Nepal, and the Philippines deal with transnational migration of women. A striking fact pointed out by Sepali Kottegoda in her paper on Sri Lanka is that remittances from Sri Lankan women who migrate mostly to West Asian countries to work as housemaids have accounted for the second highest source of foreign exchange for more than two decades (p. 49). These poor women have thus become great economic assets.

Jagannath Adhikari in his paper on Nepal points out the impact of globalization on the demand for women workers in Gulf countries. For example, "in 2002, there was a demand for about 50,000 'nurses' despite the fact that Nepal is not a country known to have such skilled labour" (p.91). One can easily visualize the potential for sexual exploitation of many of these women. Adhikary also quotes an ILO report (2001) which says that "it is estimated that 5,000 to 7,000 girls are trafficked from Nepal to India and other neighbouring countries every year, and that about 200,000 Nepali girls and women are currently working in the sex industry in India" (p.92).

Maureen C. Pagaduan's article is titled : 'Leaving home : Filipino women urviving migration'. One can understand why she talks of "surviving migration". For example, she points out that " the profiles of documented ilipino women migrant workers during 1992-93 show them to be young, ound 20 to 29 years of age and unmarried. Sarah Balabagan, the Filipina omestic imprisoned in Saudi Arabia after killing her employer who attempted to rape her, was 'only 14 when she was recruited" (pp. 77-78). It seems to me that such migration is a form of sex terrorism!



Arjan de Haan in his outstanding contri-bution on 'Migration, Gender, Poverty: Family as the Missing Link?' concludes: "The key argument of this paper relates to the need for a better understanding of family dynamics while studying processes of migration, and vice versa. Across India, it appears that there is not a very large variety in household forms, not as large as in Africa" (p.121). Finally, he says that "the argument here is not one of causality, regarding links between migration and poverty or well-being. Household forms do not entirely preclude migration options, or determine directly the kinds of effect they have. But different household forms may lead to different migration strategies. Linking migration to poverty is not impossible, but this needs to be sensitive to the social dynamics of which migration is a part, in this case the forms of households, and the meaning 'migration' has within the context of norms about household forms and formation"(p.121-122).

Turning to internal migration, we find a comprehensive paper by Janet Seeley, Sheila Ryan, Iqbal Alam Khan and Munshi Israil Hossain on 'Just surviving or finding space to thrive? The complexity of internal migration of women in Bangladesh'. The authors examine different forms of women migration and observe : "In a society that does not hold women in high regard, many of these women are in an even more vulnerable position due to age and poverty. They miss out on almost all government and NGO poverty alleviation initiatives, as they do not make the criteria for such assistance" (p. 187). They come to a significant conclusion : "The 'quiet revolution' in Bangladesh, of increasing numbers of independent women migrants, may mean more opportunities, but hidden within it is much silent suffering" (p. 187).

Let us now turn to studies conducted in different states of India. Nitya Rao in her paper on migration from the Santal Parganas argues that "while migration has for long been a part of the livelihood strategies of the Santals, the results are not always beneficial" (p. 145). She comes to an important conclusion: "…what is striking is the shift in the nature of migration – from long-term to seasonal and from male to female" (p. 146). It is unfortunate that in the context of property rights, land is seen as an essential part of male identity, but not female identity.

Shashank Shekhar Sinha focuses on Jharkhand which is the heartland of a large Adivasi population. He analyses migration in a somewhat theoretical perspective and talks of "structures of oppression". His conclusion refers to the disastrous consequences of migration. To quote him at length : "As Adivasi patriarchies negotiated with the forces and agents unleashed by the growth of colonialism and capitalism, tribal collectivism and traditional social safeguards were fast giving way to individual gains and competition. Women were either pushed to the margins of the resultant political economics or were accommodated, albeit in limited capacities, at the lowest levels. The introduction of alien capitalist relations and unequal wage regimes in the tribal heartland led to a substantial restructuring of the traditional division of labour, and relocation of women's economic roles from self-supporting agricultural workers to migrant wage-workers and casual labourers. On the other hand, prolonged and sustained interface with the immigrating caste and religious groups went a long way in re-arranging social and gender relations in Adivasi societies, with disastrous consequences

> ...despite the rising number of female migrants, women are not given equal importance as compared to men in migration, since they are still not perceived as equal actors worthy of being accounted for" (p.9)......... This book should be very useful to all students of gender studies and also researchers in the field of migration. Every chapter gives elaborate notes, references and further readings.

for the women" (p. 166).

Ravinder Kaur studies migrant women focusing on female domestic workers in Delhi. Her study shows that "internal migration by women is no longer male-dependent and that women are migrating in response to economic and social imperatives. Paid employment, especially if it is steady, does not only have economic consequences allowing the woman to stabilise her household financially, but also has far reaching sociological consequences" (pp. 211-212).

Geetanjali Gangoli's paper is devoted to the complex relationship between sex work, poverty and migration in the states of West Bengal and Orissa. She refers to a study conducted by the Central Social Welfare Board which quotes the opinions of prostitutes about the judiciary as follows : "They do not consider us as human beings... They add to our harassment and humiliation... They fail to understand the human aspects of the problem. They perceive it as a law and order problem". (p. 231). She also refers approvingly to the following statement of Calcutta sex workers union: "Sex workers suggest that rehabilitation is neither desirable, nor possible. What is necessary is that sex work be decriminalized, and that women and men in the profession be allowed to practise their trade without harassment" (p. 231).

Svati P. Shah's paper is on Mumbai's day wage labour market and the focus is on sexuality. She also gives some case studies but she seems to get lost in her theoretical conceptualization!

This book should be very useful to all students of gender studies and also researchers in the field of migration. Every chapter gives elaborate notes, references and further readings. My main criticism of this volume is that much of the space in each paper is devoted to literature review rather than spelling out the original ideas of the author. Perhaps the format of the series was planned likewise. Thapan, the Series editor asserts that : "The five volumes are clearly also the result of an attempt to address the issues in an interdisciplinary perspective while being rooted in their particular disciplinary domains. This has in fact resulted in the volumes using very eclectic theoretical approaches as well as a focus on particular issues in their complexity and variety" (p. 11).

I think much of this theorizing is unnecessary in understanding reality. The authors should have concentrated more on their original field work and case studies rather than on "forced" theoretical jargon and added to the so called complexity of the situation. In a country like India with its incredible diversity, it is somewhat naïve to be under the illusion of some great theoretical formulation! It is not a great discovery to find that poor women migrate because they are poor! It is much more important to focus on socio economic, psychological and even political causes and consequences of migration. Nevertheless, the volume under review is a valuable publication and the publishers deserve credit for launching this new series.■

Ashish Bose is Honorary Professor at the Institute of Economic Growth, Delhi.

Gendered Analysis

Sushila Zeitlyn

MIGRANT WOMEN AND WORK
Edited by Anuja Agrawal
Women and Migration in Asia Series, Vol. IV, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 226, Rs. 350.00

Migrant Women and Work includes a collection of papers that were presented at an international conference on Women and Migration in Delhi in 2003. This work challenges the popular misconception that migration is a male activity. This volume adds to a growing body of literature that demonstrates the contribution that a gendered analysis can make to understanding the complex phenomenon of migration and the feminization of labour migration in particular.

The case studies in this volume focus on solo women who migrate for work and challenge the assumption that women migrate as dependents. Some of the case studies argue that migration cannot be understood purely in economic terms. Raguram's work on Asian women doctors in the UK challenges the gendered assumption that women's migration can only be understood in terms of economic need or family and kinship identity. Brody describes the influences that determine the ways rural Thai women who migrate to the city to work as cleaners, factory workers and entrepreneurs, define their ambitions and measure their own success. She argues that personal success in their own eyes is bound up with being seen as a responsible adult and migration is regarded as a means to fulfil these responsibilities.

The eight papers in this collection illustrate the variety of experiences and the diverse forces that influence the choices of Asian women, from very different classes and backgrounds, who migrate either within their countries or across national boarders. They include case studies of Keralite nurses in the Gulf, rural Thai women who migrate to Bangkok, Asian doctors in the UK, Bedia women who travel to Mumbai and Filipina women who migrate to various destinations. They reveal some of the complex forces and institutions that influence individuals and shape patterns of migration. A question running through this volume is the extent to which women migrants have agency.

In different ways the authors show how the movements of women in search of work within their own country or abroad are shaped by and shape gender relations and the gendered division of labour in both sending and receiving communities. The ways that migration is viewed and experienced by these women and their families is mediated by gendered expectations of the communities they leave and those they join. Parrenas compares the contrasting ways that Filipino children make sense of and represent the migration of their mothers and fathers. Ogaya finds that Filipina women's migration is interpreted very ambivalently and she too links this to Filipina conceptions of motherhood. The case studies provide a real insight into the complexities and contradictions in the lives of women who migrate and the ways their migration is viewed by their families. They also show how class and educational background interact with gender to influence the experiences and opportunities that women have.

Gulati's overview makes the point that domestic work and sex work are two of the major (but not the only) occupations that migrant women perform. The global increase in the demand for both these categories of worker is a factor in the feminization of migration that internationalizes the sexual division of labour. This combines with growing inequalities in wages and opportunities to create new demands for female migrant workers. As middle class women enter the labour market the domestic division of labour in their families is threatened, creating stress and a potential challenge to existing gender relations and the domestic status quo.

Agrawal, in her introduction to the volume, suggests that the availability

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of women migrant workers allows women from one class or ethnic group to pass their domestic burden to their less privileged employees and thus avoid confronting the inequitable gender division of labour and the double burden that women shoulder. This allows the gendered division of labour in the home and lack of state provision to remain unchallenged in the receiving community. When women migrant workers lack rights as citizens men and states may duck their obligations.

The stresses experienced in the relatively affluent receiving families and communities are off loaded on to the less affluent migrants and their families. Migration helps to mask such stresses and gender conflicts in the receiving community while exacerbating stress in the sending community by creating "care deficit". She observes that, by comparison with the literature on domestic workers, there is a marked absence of any discussion of family or social back ground and identity in the literature on sex workers. This insight begs the question of why this is so. A related question is how do we account for the large numbers of illegal and undocumented women migrants that Gulati refers to in her overview? By failing to give women migrant workers legal status, states make them more vulnerable to exploitation and make their contribution to both the sending and receiving economies less visible.

An interesting theme that runs through some of these papers is the ways that the status of migrant worker and the process of migration can mask potential conflicts and contradictions in changing gender roles and the division of labour. Agrawal suggests that migration is central to understanding the way that sex work is organized and managed. The geographical distance involved in migration creates a social separation that enables families and societies to deny their association and economic dependence on sex workers. In her ethnography she describes how the organization of the Bedia kinship system facilitates the women's way of life and work as well as care for their children, but at the same time it allows their kin to deny any knowledge of their work. The Bedia women usually migrate within India but a few migrate abroad, illustrating the continuity between internal cross boarder migration.

Policy and the role of governments and international agreement in protecting and promoting the rights of women who travel for work across borders, is touched on in many of the papers. Percot's paper on Indian nurses, for example, refers to the ways differences between legal regimes for migration to the Gulf and to Europe and the USA structure the choices and experiences of nurses. She describes the insecurity that women overseas feel when they have limited rights that are linked exclusively to their employment contract or "just the right to work and keep silent". Ogaya writes that the majority of Overseas Filipino Workers are contract workers who are either undocumented or strictly controlled by their contracts and have little scope for upward social mobility. For many she says, migration involves "de-skilling". Gulati describes this "contract migration" as; a system where "workers move between countries with strict contracts for specified periods of time with severely limited benefits and rights" and few if any possibilities of bringing their families along. This system does not recognize any workers rights and prevents their social integration. She refers to international and state actions being required to protect the rights of women who migrate but does not make any specific recommendations on the types of action required.

The laws and policies that govern migration are also gendered and may either reflect and reinforce or else contribute to changing existing gender norms. For example, laws that make it illegal for women to migrate alone from some states without their husband's permission support and legitimate the subordination of women by their husbands or fathers. Domestic workers are vulnerable when they migrate to other countries but they may also be isolated and barely visible within their own countries. Gendered notions of what is public and private may legitimate or constrain states from legislating and protecting the labour rights of domestic workers who may not even be covered by legislation that protects women from domestic violence. Internal migrants are on the whole poorer than their counterparts who travel abroad, and the labour conditions they encounter may be worse.

The last paper by Jeffreys looks explicitly and critically at government policies and international conventions. She argues that there is an international denial by scholars and policy makers of the fact that the majority of women engaged in sex work are being trafficked for prostitution. By representing this as migration she maintains that society is denying the reality of trafficking and the suffering and abuse involved.

Men who migrate represent a gap in this volume. By focusing primarily on women, apart from some tantalizing glimpses, we miss the potential that a more relational analysis that included men might have had. As a result these essays do not go as far as they might have done in challenging some of the implicitly gendered assumptions and myths about migration generally. The volume leaves one wondering about migrant men's motivations, identities and vulnerability to exploitation. Do men who migrate conform more or less closely to masculine gender norms and expectations? Does migration confirm or undermine their power in the home? One of the interesting aspects of mobility and migration is the potential it has to either reinforce or challenge and change existing gender relations and ideas. Some of the papers in this book give an insight into this but the most important message in this book is that women also migrate for work and should no longer be invisible. Policy makers as well as scholars of migration should note the complexity and the humanity that these ethnographies and overviews reveal.■

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Book News	**Book News**

India's Security: Charged Perspectives by Col. Ravi Nanda, AVSM discusses and provides an indepth analysis of the change which have transformed the world post-9\11—geopolitically, geoeconomically and geostrategically, and the ways in which India has sought to deal with the new challenges.
Lancer's Books, 2005, pp. 251, Rs. 495.00

The Eye Opening: As I Saw by Admiral (Retd.) Vishnu Bhagwat, former Chief of Naval Staff covers a scenario of a more dangerous and predatory world moving away from peace and reconciliation and how it impinges on India's external security.
Manas Publications, 2006, pp. 247, Rs. 495.00

"Our Future is Clear: There is Nothing for Us"

Ritu Menon

GENDER, CONFLICT AND MIGRATION
Edited by Navnita Chadha Behera
Sage Publications, Delhi, 2006, pp.310, Rs. 395.00

Pakistani scholar, Tayyab Mahmud, speaking of the "spectre of the migrant" that haunts the modern world, says that immigration in public debate and political rhetoric is presented as a "problem to be solved, a flaw to be corrected, a war to be fought, and a flow to be stopped." The immigrant, he says, hovers at the edges of her adopted society:

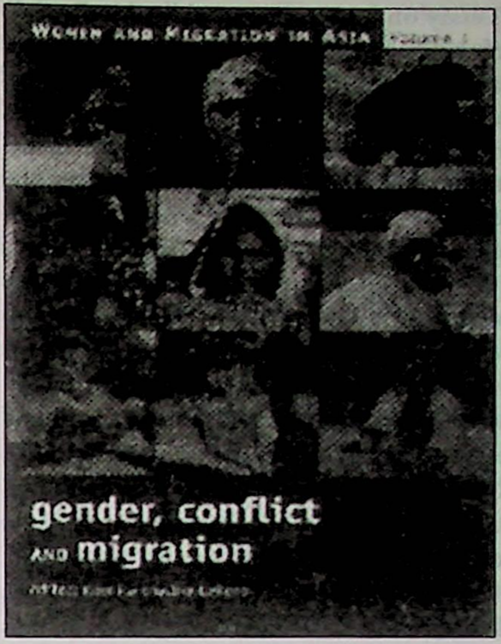
> As a non-citizen, she is to be marginalized in the distribution of legal rights and political protections. As a cultural signifier, she is to be erased. As a violator of borders she provides the rationale to ever strengthen the territorial divides. The threat perception triggered by the immigrant traverses two fields: that of the state and that of the nation. The immigrant puts at issue the inviolability of borders, territoriality of sovereignty, particularity of jurisdiction, and uniformity of citizenship—fundamental characteristics of the modern state.

As Navnita Chadha Behera says in her cogent and comprehensive Introduction to this volume, the world refugee (or migrant) map tallies almost perfectly with the world conflict map; what is also remarkable is that the first map is predominantly female. This is what makes the publication of this volume so timely and so important. Earlier studies of refugees and migration (and there have been plenty) have, by and large, fallen into what Mahmud characterizes as the problem—flow-war-unwelcome flow syndrome; in other words the usual IR, demographic, neo-realist, state-centric understanding. This collection of papers eschews this mechanical and gender-blind consideration and it focuses sharply on gender/women migrants across South Asia, for two important reasons:

> Conceptually, being alert to the power relations of gender enables us to see features of migration that are otherwise overlooked. Empirically, it has led to new topics of concern: transnational identity, health and human rights of migrant women, and forced migration as a result of conflicts and political violence.

The volume considers both internally, as well as externally conflict-induced displacement in the region. It is significant that not a single country in South Asia is free from this kind of migration—the Karen, Shan, Mon and others in Burma; Chakmas and Hindus in Bangladesh; Afghans in Pakistan; Tamils and Muslims in Sri Lanka and India; Kashmiri Pandits in India: Bhutanese in Nepal, and so on. Equally significant is the fact that women make up 42-50 per cent of refugees, migrants and internally displaced persons in the region. Rita Manchanda gives us a sobering enumeration: in Sri Lanka, it is estimated that about 55,000 women have been widowed; more than 7,60,000 IDPs created; and 1,000,000 people made refugees. Nearly a third of all affected households are female-headed. In 1978 some 200,000 Rohingya Muslim women from Myanmar's eastern state of Arakan fled to Bangladesh to escape being systematically raped by Rakhine (Buddhist) thugs; and in 1991, this number swelled to 2,50,900. Statistics for Afghan women in Pakistan, Kashmiri Pandit women in India and others are equally numbing.

The UN defines any conflict with more than 1,00 battlefield deaths as a major conflict, and in this volume, the term covers the entire spectrum of interstate wars, internal conflict, ethnically-driven insurgencies and secessionist movements. As definitions go this is fairly expansive, but it completely overlooks areas of persistent, low-intensity conflict like that which prevails in borderlands—the Punjab-Rajasthan-Kashmir fenced border, e.g., or the North East or the LoC in Kashmir, where migration is constant even though borderlands themselves may not be battlefields.



The protracted nature of conflict in South Asia—of more than twenty-one years in at least three countries, Sri Lanka, India and Pakistan-Afghanistan—means that, although there may be periods of lull in warfare, there is no such thing as a post-conflict phase, no acceptable closure on hostility or violence. What some analysts have called the no-war, no-peace syndrome, or peace in a time of war. This also means that there is no real end to conflict-induced migration, either; Saba Khattak's paper on Afghan women refugees makes this amply clear. She describes three distinct phases of migration by Afghans into Pakistan: during the Soviet occupation; during the Mujahideen resistance; and after the Taliban takeover.

Broadly speaking, the essays in this volume encompass three sets of concerns, which I shall try to engage within a linked kind of discussion. The first set of issues coheres around the question of "voluntary" or "forced" migration, or "choice vs. coercion". Here the general consensus among contributors is that, as far as women are concerned, the initial migration is made from a no-choice position. With important caveats: Rita Manchanda argues persuasively that with the Rohingyas of Burma, the distinction between choice and coercion has been completely confounded. Branded as "illegal aliens" in Bangladesh (in much the same way that Bangladeshis are called "infiltrators" in India), the Rohingyas are unwanted in their first place of refuge. Intimidation by the police and the fear of being pushed back makes them "voluntarily opt" for being trafficked as illegal migrants to Karachi. One can see what the fate of adolescent girls or young widows is likely to be. As Manchanda says,

> Destitute and often with dependent children, for them flight often begins with gang-rape, and the sexual violence continues throughout their flight as they are likely to be raped by the Bangladesh Rangers, in the refugee camps or slum settlements, and then by the Indian and Pakistani border police.

Butalia makes a similar point about Hindu and Muslim women abducted and recovered after Partition in 1947. Speaking generally of the mass migrations that took place then, she says, "In theory, everyone had a choice to move or to stay, but in practice staying on was virtually impossible, and most people therefore 'chose' to 'leave'. For women, the "choice" (if one can call it that) was between rape, abduction, forcible marriage, suicide or death at the hands of their kinsmen. As Manchanda finds the distinction between economic and political reasons for migration "meaningless", so too Butalia speaks interchangeably of "migration/dislocation/displacement". The issue, ultimately, is of the rightlessness of women as refugee subjects.

Darini Rajasingham-Senanayake demurs. Speaking about displaced Muslim women in eastern Sri Lanka, she maintains that after the first displacement, subsequent migrations may actually be chosen; the prospect of better work opportunities in the Gulf countries acts an impetus for many women. She argues that the social disruption caused by conflicts has opened up new forms of migration and economic agency for women; whereas previous labour migration was male-led, conflict-induced overseas labour migration is increasingly female-led, partly in response to changes in the international labour market.

The second set of concerns centres on the public-private divide, represented by home and country; safe and unsafe spaces; and the enforced, involuntary catapulting of women out of the private and into the public

domain. Nayanika Mookherjee's essay on how young, middle class Bengali women left their homes (and left behind social conventions regarding the proper place for women) to sing songs of liberation in a morale-raising exercise for fighters during the war of liberation, is an example. Anasua Raychaudhury's account of Hindu women in East Bengal forced to leave the *andarmahal* at Partition, is the exact opposite. Saba Khattak points out that Afghan women refugees in Peshawar use the word "*watan*" interchangeably for home as well as country, eliding the sharp distinction between home and the world. A symbol, and space, of violence when it comes to gender relations, a woman's own relationship to her house/home actually represents a sanctuary, albeit a patriarchal one.

Perhaps the most interesting discussion here is Rajasingham's, who maintains that the long civil war in Sri Lanka has recast the stigma of widowhood in a culturally conservative society. A generation of young Tamil war widows, she says, are challenging conventional Hindu strictures on widowhood by refusing to be socially and culturally marginalized. Their assertion is highly symbolic and visible: they reject widows' weeds and continue to wear the red bindi on their foreheads.

This brings me to the third set of concerns addressed by this volume, the potentially liberating fall-out of conflict-induced migration.

Both the Sri Lankan and Burmese cases offer thought-provoking analyses of how women, trapped in impossible circumstances, marginalized at multiple intersecting levels of gender, ethnicity and statelessness, have transformed their lives. Mary O'Kane's Burmese narratives demonstrate how women became activists, discovered their capacity for intervention, used their displacement to "travel back and forth through their memories, assessing and reassessing their past, formulating new understandings, asking new questions regarding gender roles". These included demands for meaningful political participation in relevant decision-making processes, and led to the formation of groups like the Shan Women's Action Network (1998) and others. In Sri Lanka, displaced Tamil and Muslim women perforce became heads of households and sole income-earners, learnt to egotiate male-dominated public spaces, and in the process, acquired what arini calls an "ambivalent empowerment".

It is not uncommon to make a virtue of necessity, and extreme adversity an sometimes bring about wholesome transformation. But exceptions do not deny the general rule. One of the key objectives of studies such as the ones here, is to reorient policy recommendations in a gender-sensitive manner and carefully attend to their implementation. Anthony Good's case study of South Asian asylum seekers in the UK is salutary. The 1951 UN Convention on Asylum deliberately excluded gender-based persecution from its purview because its drafters doubted that "persecution on account of sex would ever arise"! But even if it hadn't, it wouldn't make a difference because the five countries of South Asia have not signed the Convention. Good recounts two extremely telling cases of a Tamil woman from Jaffna and two Pakistani women, all victims of sexual violence, and their attempts at seeking asylum in the Netherlands and Britain, respectively. The first was rejected because "the version of facts presented… lacks any reference whatsoever to political issues"; the second because the women did not constitute a "particular social group" (as women) fearing persecution, so could not seek asylum on those grounds. Happily, however, the Pakistani women's plea was favourably considered in appeal, and it made for significant changes in the Home Office's Asylum Policy Instructions.

Humanitarian aid, rehabilitation and resettlement, camp conditions, personal security, even the allocation of food and rations are all gender-differentiated, and as several contributors—Manchanda, O'Kane, Rajasingham—point out, can and must be consciously geared to take women's particular vulnerabilities into account. Oishik Sircar goes so far as to advocate the establishment of regional and national "gender asylum laws" in order to ensure that they are.

Individually, as well as collectively, then, the essays in this collection cover a great deal of ground, and are empirically rich and theoretically sophisticated. All in all, a commendable piece of work.■

Ritu Menon, writer, publisher and feminist, is the author of *Border and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition.*

Integrating Gender, Overcoming Disaster

Deepti Priya Mehrotra

GENDER DIMENSIONS IN DISASTER MANAGEMENT: A GUIDE FOR SOUTH ASIA
By Madhavi Malalgoda Ariyabandu and Maithree Wickramasinghe
Zubaan, New Delhi, 2005, pp.180, Rs. 195.00

This book is a useful 'how to' guide to mainstreaming gender in the management of natural disasters. For anybody in the field, this is likely to be a handy tool. The writers demystify links between gender and disaster management, within a sustainable development framework. It is a reader-friendly book, with exceptionally evocative sketches, although the cover is inexplicably ugly.

Madhavi Malalgoda Ariyabandu and Maithree Wickramasinghe, both based in Sri Lanka, are eminently suited to explain the practical as well as theoretical issues at stake. Ariyabandu leads the Disaster Mitigation team at ITDG South Asia, and has considerable experience of working with communities living with disaster. Wickramasinghe is a teacher of women's studies, and has authored several studies, articles and a book on gender issues.

The first edition of *Gender Dimensions In Disaster Management: A Guide For South Asia* was brought out by ITDG, an international development agency founded by E.F. Schumacher. ITDG South Asia currently works in the areas of energy, transport, manufacturing, agro-processing, and disaster mitigation. This book draws upon a wide range of experiences from South Asian countries. By capturing disaster risk reduction lessons from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, it facilitates south-south knowledge sharing.

Ariyabandu and Wickramasinghe argue that risks posed by natural hazards have serious implications for development in general, and livelihoods in particular. Gender concerns experienced during developmental processes apply also in the context of disaster, sometimes with exagerrated weight. The specific vulnerabilities and capacities of women and men, as well as the social dynamics of disaster situations are often not obvious or visible. A number of vital considerations get exposed through detailed lifestyle analysis. If ignored or left unattended, as is frequently the case, these concerns impede developmental efforts.

The dominant approach to disaster management has focused on emergency response and relief provision. The authors elucidate an alternative approach, within the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF). Under this, risk reduction and hazard vulnerability are set within the wider context of people's livelihoods. People generally operate in a 'vulnerability context', coping with natural hazards being an integral part of managing their livelihoods. The gendered division of labour in normal times influences how women and men cope with disaster. Vulnerabilities and degrees of risk differ, as do the capacities for coping.

Dominant trends in development are creating conditions for natural disasters, by depleting natural resources and irreversibly changing the earth's environment. The consequences of ill conceived, uncoordinated and unsustainable development are being felt acutely in South Asia. Certain sections of society are more vulnerable to disasters than others. Recognizing this, disaster management works with vulnerable populations on risk reduction, disaster preparedness, immediate relief, and long-term reconstruction. The authors emphasize solutions that change social structures, thus reducing people's vulnerability and enhancing their capacities. Disasters, in this paradigm, can become opportunities for social transformation.

Differential impact of disasters on women and men is examined, with

detailed examples from South Asia. Gendered division of labour carries over, for instance in Bangladesh "traditional gender specific work such as carrying water, cooking, caring for children and animals became so difficult for women during flood conditions that their lives were at risk.... Often there was no alternative, because there were no men around to help, and even if there were, they did not assist with women's work because of the powerful ideas of gendered division of labour" (p 56). However, on occasion gender roles may change, and even interchange between women and men, in response to a crisis situation. For instance if men die, are injured, or migrate, women might become household heads, and sole breadwinners for their families.

Some cultural taboos might become less prominent during disasters. Yet more often, during disaster, the general low status of girls and women, male preference and discriminatory practices leads to a 'males first' situation. Female family members are deprived of relief that may be in short supply. Men in the family are prioritized, as they are in normal times. Girls and women may be ignored or harassed by official agencies. Sabmeraj, a Myanmarese refugee, narrates, "As we do not have a man among the family members it took time — 18 days — to get our names on the refugee list. Those who had men in their family, they were very fortunate to have their names on the official refugee list at the first chance" (p 63). During a drought in Rajasthan, India, tubewell water was issued only in the middle of the night. Women braved the journey, sometimes walking up to 4 kilometres, despite the risks involved. There were incidents of women being harassed and exploited by upper caste groups and contractors in the drought relief work as well.

In times of disaster women are often forced to sell their personal assets such as jewelery in order to secure food for the family. Being the family caretakers, women experience the psychological impact of disasters acutely. Many suffer from post-traumatic stress disorders. As economic, psychological and physical crises come together, women resort to extreme strategies: "It has been found that during floods in Orissa a large number of women and children drown. When they survive disasters, in destitute conditions, younger women are forced into prostitution and older women turn to begging and charity" (p 69).

Men and women tend to employ different coping mechanisms when dealing with disasters. Women's roles in mitigating and preparing for disasters, in rescue operations, as sustainers and re-builders are crucial, yet largely unrecognized. Women provide nursing-care to the worst affected, often before any official relief work arrives. In Gujarat, after the 2001 earthquake, "women must still provide food and water for the household and tend to animals who are desperately in need of water and fodder; they cook and clean in their huts, tents or shelters under plastic sheeting, supervise children at play in the rubble or at study in makeshift schools, and care for the ill and the injured out of doors, without ready water or food" (p 79). Women's social networks might provide emergency survival support, by facilitating sharing of food items, fuel, bedding, material for makeshift shelters etc.

In some parts of Punjab, Pakistan, women repair houses as a norm. During the aftermath of disasters, they get actively involved in reconstruction efforts, especially rebuilding and restoring houses. In Rajasthan (India), "drought relief work is mainly done by women, and invariably involves the construction of roads and other infrastructure" (p 82).

Despite such a wealth of data and experiences indicating the importance of gender considerations, most contemporary disaster management efforts continue to bypass all this. They ignore gender-based social analysis and fail to adopt a gender perspective. Their interventions tend to reinforce gender stereotypes and the continued invisibility of women. Gender-specific risks and needs are not attended to. Gender-specific capacities are not fully utilized. Women's increased workloads, health and security risks are not addressed.

Ariyabandu and Wickramasinghe make detailed suggestions for policymakers, based on the arguments already presented. These suggestions are tabulated, with a set of 'good practices' listed against each 'policy requirement' (pp. 95-114). These 'blue pages' for policymakers are followed by 'yellow pages' that contain guidelines for disaster management practitioners, complete with checklists, observation charts and planning schedules. A comprehensive glossary of terms, and annotated bibliography, are included.

Deepti Priya Mehrotra is a political scientist, currently teaching Elementary Education, Journalism, and Conflict Transformation & Peacebuilding courses at Lady Shri Ram College, Delhi University. She is a long-time activist and her writings include *Home Truths: Stories of Single Mothers* (Penguin, 2003).

Communication

This has reference to the review of my book: *Crisis and Contention in Indian Society*, published in your esteemed journal (vol. XXX, No.7, July 2006) by T.N. Madan. I thank Professor Madan profusely for reviewing the book and *The Book Review* for publishing the review. I want to make the following clarifications.

One, the book was published in 2005 and not in 2006. Two, although Madan finds the expression Union of Indian States (UIS) quaint, let it be noted that it is a constitutional expression. The first sentence of the Constitution of India reads: 'India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States'. The states under reference being Indian states I thought the expression UIS is admissible. Three, I completely agree with Madan that modernity (and globality too) is destructive of diversity. But there is an element of voluntariness in processes such as modernization and globalization and the 'destructions of diversity' caused by them often occurs unobtrusively. In contrast, the institution of nation-state and the ideology of cultural monism consciously intend to destroy cultural diversity. And I was not simply listing the factors which destroy diversity but highlighting the ruthlessness of nation-state and cultural monism. Four, the notion of secularism is a contentious one and professor Madan has done pioneering work on the theme with special reference to India. My purpose in this book is not to debate the conceptual contours of secularism (which I have done elsewhere) but to understand whether the Indian state is adhering to the version of secularism which it is constitutionally mandated to follow. To evaluate the performance of the Indian state based on the western version of secularism is pointless. Five, in commenting on my plea for a second reorganization of Indian states Madan writes: 'He does not go into the economic costs and administrative viability of small states' (p.26). But this is not correct. I have written on p.151: 'in conceding the demands for new states, factors such as viable size (population and territory), financial sustainability and regional-cultural specificity-should also be taken into account. In this context not only the fission of the existing units but also their fusion may be thought of'. My basic argument is that a broad and rough co-terminality between political-administrative units (panchayats, districts, regional councils, provincial states) and linguistic units is desirable. If there are 'encysted speech groups', to recall Madan's phrase, whose language/dialect are different from that of the language of the state in which they are situated, concede them a district or a Panchayat. I believe this is a better and lasting solution than engaging in interminable conflicts between contending groups. Six, what I said at point five takes care of Madan's reservation with regard to Kashmiriyat. The issue of Kashmir Valley as it is perceived today worldwide is not an intra-state (Indian) problem but an inter-state (India-Pakistan) issue. At any rate, the emphasis on Kashmiriyat need not necessarily diminish the importance of 'Dogriyat' and 'Ladhakiyat' ; these identity issues can be and should be attended to within the state of Jammu and Kashmir. It is true that autonomy (for J&K) is indeed too broad a prescription but the details can be worked out once the basic principle, be it 'autonomy' or 'self-rule' is agreed to.Incidentally, how is self-rule different from secession/sovereignty? Seven, the list of 'references' are the books/articles actually referred to in the book; I agree that a 'bibliography' could have listed many more items.

Finally, I apologise for the error with regard to the population figure of Arunachal Pradesh; the correct figure for 1991 is 864558. I often say that only two persons read my books, the other being the proof reader. It seems that even the proof reader does not read!

T.K. Oommen

Between the Ideal and the Real

Kalpana Kannabiran

RHETORIC AND REALITY: GENDER AND THE COLONIAL EXPERIENCE IN SOUTH ASIA
Edited by Avril A. Powell and Siobhan Lambert-Hurley
Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2006, pp.320, Rs.645.00

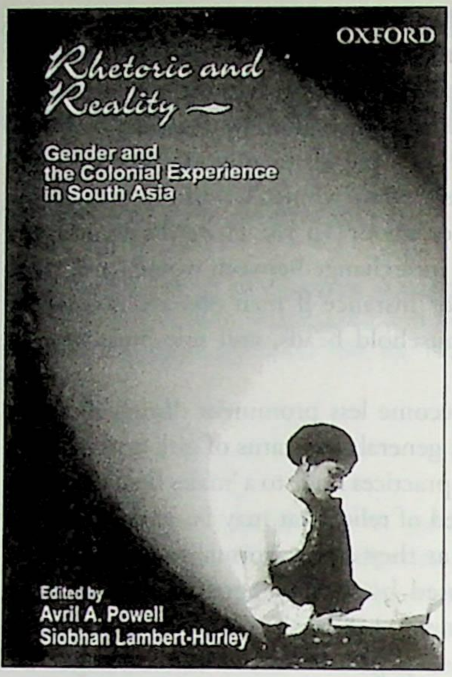
This collection of ten essays explores the themes of domesticity, the body and modernity in colonial India, examining in the process the relationship between the ideal and the real with respect to gender ideologies in the colonial period.

By the late nineteenth century, the home provided the space for the contestation of colonialism, the site where modernities were negotiated. How was the construction of modernity constituted by class? Swapna Banerjee in her exploration of the politics of mothering and domestic work, through domestic manuals and personal memoirs of the period, wonders whether aristocratic women who dared to live differently, in fact brought different behavioural standards for upper class women. Was the choice of living by different rules open to all women irrespective of class? Even within the aristocratic and relatively affluent classes, where change was not spontaneous, was there any way in which the colonial government could initiate change and chip away at female seclusion in barely perceptible ways? The questions raised by the Committee on Female Education in Bengal in 1908 whether it would be appropriate for purdanashin women, who had upto that point been educated within the household, to attend centres in each locality that drew women from different households together, introduced the peripatetic approach to zenana education, an idea that drew much support from the local intelligentsia. Asha Nayeem and Avril Powell trace the transformations in the constitution of the zenana through new ideas of female education in colonial Bengal.

There were other ways in which the family-community did not open up, but buried girls within instead. Debates on female infanticide in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries reveal for Veena Oldenberg, the collusion between imperial officers and Indian informants. Despite a skewed power equation, this collusion, she argued, opened out two possibilities for the native elders – first they were singled out and recognized as patriarchal authorities in their local context by the new rulers, and second, they were able to impute ancient religious or caste compulsions to the practice of infanticide to prevent it from being investigated on a case-by-case basis – the "barbarity plea" as Oldenberg calls it. Colonial officers for their part then, ignored the socio-economic causes of female infanticide, especially its relation to the agricultural distress of the late nineteenth century.

It was necessary to move away from barbarity towards civilization,in order that the project of nation building achieves fruition. For Dayananda

This collection of ten essays explores the themes of domesticity, the body and modernity in colonial India, examining in the process the relationship between the ideal and the real with respect to gender ideologies in the colonial period.



Saraswati, inherent in this civilizing mission was the need to move towards the Aryavarta, the land of the ancient Aryans who demonstrated all the qualities that made the West sovereign in his time. Stringent dietary and commensal practices and complete discipline over sexual behaviour, for him, would preserve hierarchy and rank which were constitutive of western society. Through complex links between food, bodily substances and what the body inherits, Dayananda, in *Sathyartha Prakash*, posits the body, Anshu Malhotra argues, as a metaphor of the nation. The theme of sexual control and controlled human reproduction figures in a very different way in Ruth Compton Brouwer's study of the role of medical missionaries in learning and teaching about birth control. Brouwer traces the emergence of birth control as a subject of public discussion, and maps several overlapping themes in the discussion – the support to birth control that included eugenics concerns; the condemnation of its use outside marriage; the medicalization of birth control and the tension with Gandhian principles of self control rather than external manipulation. Finally, of continuing relevance today the distancing of advocacy from commercialism. The spread of ideas of new medical practice saw the professionalization of nursing in Britain and America at the end of the Victorian era. Organized nursing began in this period to actively pursue the spirit of internationalism, culminating in the setting up of the International Council of Nurses in 1899. Rosemary Fitzgerald examines the divisions within and the exclusions from this imagined nursing community – the devaluation of indigenous nursing traditions, the presumptions of hierarchy based on race and language, and the imperial foundations of modern nursing. Straddling modern medicine and Indian modernity was Haimabati Sen – who travelled from being child widow to lady doctor. Her struggle for autonomy, against sexual harassment in an all male profession, and her insatiable urge to provide succour to her patients against all odds are moving. Geraldine Forbes, through a painstaking account of Haimabati's life, shows us how she held her own in difficult circumstances, how her methods differed depending on the situation and how she skillfully framed demands sometimes in the language of the Raj, sometimes acting outside their view and at other times openly defiant of orders.

In a primarily female missionary force that propagates egalitarian Quaker religious ideology, how do hierarchies based on gender, class, race and religion interrupt the rhetoric of egalitarianism? Siobhan Lambert-Hurley, in her study of the Quaker missionaries in Bhopal state, explores the ways in which these women navigated the contradictions they were confronted with, suggesting that this group of missionaries was indeed distinct from other missionaries both with respect to the egalitarian internal structure of their mission and with respect to their greater tolerance of local culture and political activities. Finally, the relationship between rhetoric and practice – rather the place of rhetoric in reform. This is a question that has come up time and again in assessments of prominent male social reformers in different regions – their inability to live the realities they propagated. And yet, unarguably, there is a value in rhetoric in that it enables a critical engagement with colonialism and provides a vision of a new world. Avril Powell's account of the place of Syed Ameer Ali, seems to suggest such a limited appreciation of his work.■

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Emerging Themes

Gurpreet K. Maini

CONTESTED REPRESENTATION: PUNJABI WOMEN IN FEMINIST DEBATE IN PAKISTAN
By Tahmina Rashid
Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2006, pp.403, Rs. 595.00

Rashid's study is lucid, accessible, systematic and detailed, as she straddles the history of the gender movement in Pakistan. She begins with her story of how gender activism had its genesis in the drawing rooms of Pakistan by "bored upper class housewives", then she enunciates the dynamics of feminism.

Women in the subcontinent have been under a paradoxical purview; on the one hand, major issues pertaining to them are peripheral in the body politic; on the other, they have been the repositories of religious mores and the cultural custodians of their habitat. Even so, their public façade mirrors the whims of the political and socio-religious strictures outlined by the major opinion building agency i.e., the other gender. In the subcontinent as in the West, feminism has had a trickle down effect from the 'surplus' elite women, who formed conglomerates of pressure groups to tweak socio-cultural problems afflicting their sisters at the grassroot level.

Tahmina Rashid, a gender focused academic, purports that women's studies has been pursued on a single trajectory, whereas it should have a binary approach to the two distinct sites of reference – the urban elite women and the rural lower middle class women. In her words "these historical accounts are silent, regarding the lower and lower middle class women, in Pakistan, whose experiences and contributions are simply subsumed into the history of the upper and upper middle class women who were visible in socio-political and economic arenas" (p.4) through the entire range of variables colonialism, human rights, social and religious discourses, Islamists, modernists, secularists and socialists.

Rashid's study is lucid, accessible, systematic and detailed, as she straddles the history of the gender movement in Pakistan. She begins with her story of how gender activism had its genesis in the drawing rooms of Pakistan by "bored upper class housewives", then she enunciates the dynamics of feminism. The first collective voice of women's activism was a group called "Womens' Action Forum", from thereon it shifted to a force to reckon with even on the political scenario. Of course, the pivotal skein throughout is her Marxian contention that upper class women remained active in social welfare arenas, voicing their concerns regarding the legal and political status and role of women, thus consciously ignoring lower and lower middle class women. Her endeavour is to draw attention to this glaring lacuna. On this score, my attention inevitably goes to her namesake Tehmina Durrani's book *My Feudal Lord*, about upper class women captivated in gilded cages—though the genre is feminist, the thrust is on the male dominated social with overtones of the political elite.

Similarly, Dushka Syed in *Muslim Women of the British Punjab* has glossed over rural and middle class women in her narrative whereas Rashid's gender encompassing work highlights lower middle class Punjabi women, honing her contentions after conducting extensive fieldwork in the rural areas. She has used the primary method of data collection by using oral narratives, since such voices are often overlooked in most studies. Her lens turns onto the dynamics of class, locales and gender in Punjab. While reading through, inevitably I could juxtapose the scenario in the Indian Punjab with regard to rural/urban gender sites. On our side of the border, women though diffident in rural areas have a definite edge over their Pakistani sisters, by way of an easier access to education, subsequent professional exposure and are to an extent free from the impact of religious heresies like those imposed by the clergy in Pakistan. The elite women's educational exposure soars with the impact of western liberalization whereas the rural women slide into the mode of religious reform, since education is imparted under the same ambit which has had a retrogressive effect. She categorizes that "Muslims can be broadly divided into two groups : liberal reformers, who consider combining Islamic tradition with European liberalism, as the most effective way to defy Western power, and conservatives who assert that change will threaten social structures thereby facilitating Western domination.... Both groups regard women as the key to reform or conserve Muslim traditions". The former delineates the urban upper strata of women and the latter denotes the rural lower middle classes.

However, there are some similar features in both the Punjabs or would perhaps hold true of (the) most of the rural areas, for instance, in the segment "Women's situation in Pakistan" she contends that "a number of social customs and practices restrict the mobility and the involvement of women of all classes (with the exception of upper class) in national life." There are commonalities on issues such as mobility, marriage, and inheritance, divorce and economic participation. An overarching similarity is the staunch preference for male progeny and the rigidity of the patriarchal set up.

If dowry is the bane of Indian Punjabis, then their brethren on the other side are not far behind, this is in fact, one of the prime factors for favouring male progeny, "dowry is a bridal gift, the groom's family presumes it to be for their consumption". The inevitable fallout cannot be far behind, as the author says there are instances where the brides are either abused, or in some cases burnt in dowry related situations. At the crux of her study remains the pathetic predicament of the lower middle class women; in fact, whatever meagre concessions were given to women in Pakistan were political and mainly confined to the elite, while the underprivileged continued to be deprived on the basis of class as well as on gender. The chapter on the 'Evolution of women's rights in Pakistan' is interesting as well as informative. At every given stage of history women were marginalized and irrelevant, and exploitation persisted in the name of custom, tradition and religion. Society in Pakistan was structured on the basis of class and gender, further shared womanhood or issues pertaining to it are disturbed by differences in the class location of women. Women's issues continue to be interpreted in the context of Islam or the state, identities like class and location and modes of female agency. She vehemently condemns the regime of Zia ul Haq, who propped powerful, ecclesiastical groups so as to boost Islamization promulgating Hudood ordinances 'Qisas', 'Zina' and 'Diyat'. At the back of the book are three detailed appendices providing information on Muslim family laws, enforcement of 'Hadd', and the 'Law of Qisas' and 'Diyat' these would be of tremendous referral interest to anyone pursuing a study of Muslim women. Such statutes, definitions and illustrations are the manifestations of her erudition as well the micro dimensions of her study.

At the core of the book is her study of lower middle class voices—"The Emerging Themes". Even though, West Punjab is not too large an area but for her data collection and investigative record, she divides it into three major areas : South, North and Central Punjab. During the process, she is cautious enough not to contact women, via the clergy, as they may be diffident and cautious, though she realizes that rural communities in regular contact and consultation with the clergy. In fact, in our rural scenario, the clergy are not pivotal to daily community life but the religious hub definitely

is. Before the appendices, she has given details of the questionnaires framed for lower middle class women participants, the main topic being knowledge about rights and activism in Punjab; in the course of her fieldwork she discovered that very few were aware of the latter. Her study covers a wide range of women's issues like development, religious and cultural issues such as the choice of dress, purdah, dowry, divorce, inheritance as well as men's control over women's sexuality and body. In simplistic terms, these women were unanimous in their refrain that the generally accepted notion that the roles performed by men and women in society complement each other; in fact, it brings the whole issue of women's rights to a dead end because it reinforces the traditional patriarchal hierarchy.

The author's apprehensions at the end of the book are confirmed because her research manifests the lack of printed material accessible on lower middle class women. She breaks new ground by articulating these women's point of view on gender issues after empathetically interviewing them in the course of her field work. She highlights the disparity between the theoretical dimensions activists adopt and the ground realities faced by these women. The basic survival strategies, impulsive and instinctive defence mechanisms imbibed by lower middle class women are a reality, far removed from the cacophony of activists in national, international seminars, conferences and fora. There are innumerable unheard and unheeded voices, writhing in remote sites waiting to unravel their painful existence within male dominated bastions.

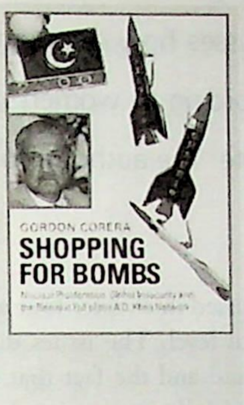
Tahmina Rashid's field work initiates this process of unravelling the lower middle class psyche through detailed field work by the use of questionnaires as well as accessing the minds of illiterate women by oral interviews. She had the distinct advantage of belonging to the same culture and spoke the same language as them. The redeeming feature she discovered in the course of her research was that these oppressed women are determined to alleviate the lives of their daughters (so that they do not traverse similar paths) by educating them, empowering them economically, so as to ease their existence socially.

This resolve should be unanimously disseminated as well as implemented by even remote gender segments in the subcontinent. The author has succeeded in corking the glaring gap in gender addressal by actvists by her specificity of a class based approach, the rigidly ensconced patriarchal hierarchy of the lower middle classes and their positioning in the socio economic set up as far as their legal rights, political representation and familial status are concerned. It is imperative that Tahmina Rashid's approach should be imbibed by the existent societies in South Asia—reading the book would be a good idea for as start.■

Gurpreet K. Maini, Officer on Special Duty with the Literary Centre at Punjab Bhawan, New Delhi.

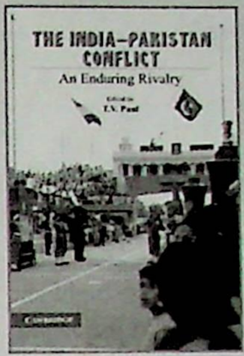
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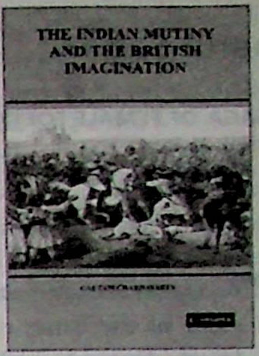
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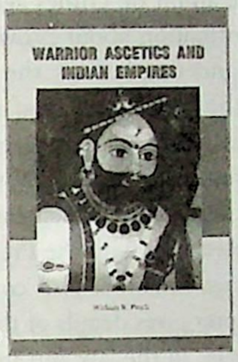
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Pinch uses the life of Anupgiri Gosain, a Hindu ascetic who lived at the end of the eighteenth century, to demonstrate that Hindu warrior ascetics were an important component of the South Asian military labour market in the medieval and early modern Indian past, and crucial to the rise of British imperialism. Today, they occupy a prominent place in modern Indian imaginations, ironically as romantic defenders of a Hindu India against foreign invasion, even though they are almost totally absent from Indian history.



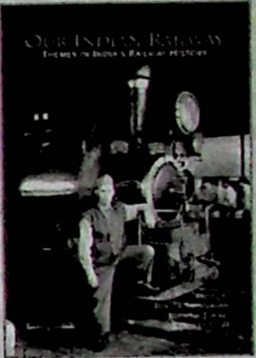
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Through the analysis of eighteenth and early nineteenth-century texts on the Hindu Kingdom of Kota in Rajasthan, Norbert Peabody explores the ways in which historical consciousness, or memory, is culturally constructed and how this consciousness informs social experience. By building on the premise that no society receives the past in a transparent, universal and objective way, he unravels how the past in Kota has been fashioned.



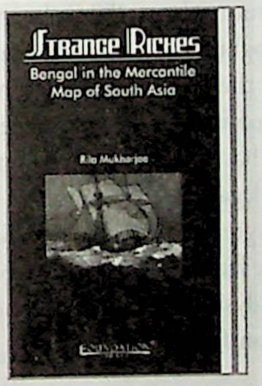
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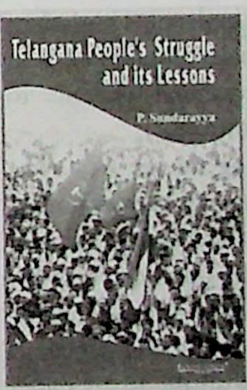
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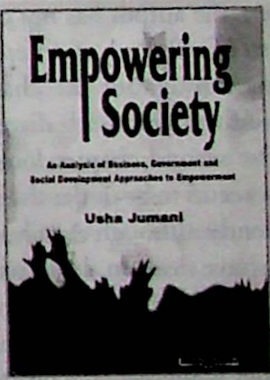
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P. SUNDARAYYA
The book provides a ringside view of the movement of squads, the network of communications and the police terror. It highlights the movement, the years in the forests fighting the Nizam's forces and then the Indian army. The book provides a wealth of detail and any account of the Telangana struggle is incomplete without reference to this authoritative work.



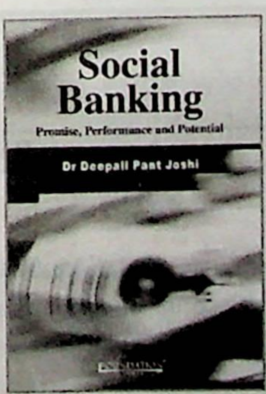
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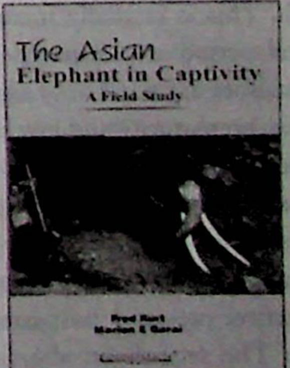
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Forthcoming

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A Field Study
FRED KURT and MARION E GARAI
This book provides data on ecology and behaviour of captive elephants in relation to their wild conspecifics. They stem from a recent research project of the authors and their co-workers in Sri Lanka and also from a number of their studies on wild and captive elephants in Sri Lanka, South India, Myanmar and South Africa as well as in several European zoos and circuses. Aspects of social behaviour, reproduction and musth as well as stereotypical behaviour, sleep and tool-use of wild and captive elephants are described. Finally, recommendations on how to improve the living conditions of captive elephants are also added.



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In Search of Preventive Strategies

Alpana Sagar

THE SAGA OF FEMALE FOETICIDE IN INDIA
By Ashok K Jain
Socio Legal Offshoots, Ascent Publications, Delhi, 2006, pp. 214, Rs. 545.00

The Saga of Female Foeticide In India by Ashok Jain attempts to highlight some of the issues of and considers preventive strategies regarding female foeticide in India. It consists of six chapters over which it traces the historical context of female foeticide in India, examines some of the data on sex ratio in the country, and scrutinizes some policies and debates on abortion, as well as the new reproductive technologies available to those desiring sex selection. The author also outlines international and national legislations regarding the unborn child and abortion, the Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques Act and the related concern of medical ethics. Finally he concludes with suggestions for preventive strategies for the problem of female foeticide.

In the first chapter the author examines the historical context of female foeticide/infanticide/devaluation of the girl child and woman in India. In order to do this he endeavours to collate information from the pre Vedic period to the present social period. This is an extremely ambitious historical exercise that covers a very large stretch of time, and would require a much greater amount of scholarship than has been put in. Additionally, while mention has been made of contradictory statements in both the *Manu Smriti*—Islamic texts as well as in the Vedic period as regards the status of women, the author has not examined such comments in detail. This lack of analysis of influence of different social processes on female value/devaluation persists throughout the chapter. Also there is an occasional tendency to place information with disregard to historical continuity.

The second chapter looks at Census data regarding the sex ratio. The author seems to be under the impression that this data has not been examined sufficiently although Agnihotri as well as Mazumdar and Krishnaji among others have dealt in detail with the matter. Nor does he mention the work done by people like by Premi or Siddhanta et al on sex ratios. Similarly, sufficient studies on sex ratios have not been reviewed and the information collected is merely laid out before us without analysis on the issues raised by these studies. Additionally the author has made a technical mistake in this chapter. He mentions that a greater number of girls as compared to boys are at risk at birth for congenital abnormalities which according to him accounts for the difference in sex ratio being skewed in favour of boys at birth. This is factually incorrect as male death rates are higher in the neonatal period as compared to female deaths. In addition, congenital abnormalities are not a very significant part of the causes of death – birth asphyxia, prematurity and low birth weight are the major causes of death in the first month after birth. More boys than girls are given birth to and born thus sex ratios are slightly skewed in favour of boys at birth under normal circumstances.

Chapter three moves into policies, debates and technologies regarding sex selection pre- and post-conception. This is an extremely informative chapter. The section on abortion policy considers the issue of woman's control over her body versus the issue of social control of women's bodies. It also discusses how abortion policies are legalized or delegalized not according to women's needs but depending on the needs of the state. The author also goes into the abortion vs pro life debate. He concludes this chapter by talking of the different reproductive technologies including the latest pre-conception technologies that help select the sex of the child before conception itself.

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Legal issues are discussed in chapter four as well, both at the national as well as the international level. The issues discussed range from the legal status of the unborn child and the fact that its rights are recognized only implicitly and not explicitly in international conventions. The author also points out that as per the Universal Declaration of Human Rights female foeticide falls within the ambit of 'crimes against humanity'. This chapter also contains useful information about provisions under the Indian Penal Code about abortion and emphasizes the need to re-examine certain provisions considering the social context of the Indian woman. There are references to many cases which make this chapter not only enlightening but also extremely interesting. Additionally the author points out various lacunae in the law. This chapter is extremely instructive for non legal persons.

The subsequent chapter deals with the Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PNDT) Act and its amendment. It also contains a section dealing with medical ethics. This chapter gives details of the PNDT Act, and of its rules and highlights inadequacies in the law and in its implementation. There is a section on medical ethics – an extremely important subject.

In the final chapter the author attempts to examine foeticide as a complexity, embedded in a host of issues that constitute the ground in which sex selective abortion occurs. While he mentions the need for a multi-pronged policy and programmatic approach, none of the solutions offered by him are new. Also the solutions mentioned do not really tackle the complex and interrelated issues that lead to female foeticide.

Overall the book has informative sections, especially those that deal with the laws and the legal system. However the author could have done with more research and greater attention to validity of information obtained in order to minimize the factual errors. Also though information is presented a social and political analysis is lacking. This book remains at best a reference for some information on female foeticide.■

Alpana Sagar is a faculty at the Centre of Social Medicine and Community Health, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi.

Book News **Book News**

In Spite of the Gods: The Strange Rise of Modern India by Edward Luce is a witty, clear and accessible account of contemporary India.
Little Brown, 2006, pp. 388, £20.00

This Ancient Lyre: Selected Poems by O.N.V. Kurup edited by A.J. Thomas is a collection translated by various people over the last several decades presents the bewildering variety of Kurup's oeuvre.
Sahitya Akademi, 2006, pp. 184, Rs. 175.00

No Onions No Garlic by Srividya Natarajan is a funny novel about the pitfalls that accompany caste pride.
Penguin, India, 2006, pp. 326, Rs. 295.00

Continuing Stereotypes

Pamela Philipose

PRIVILEGING THE PRIVILEGED: GENDER IN INDIAN ADVERTISING
By Sharada J. Schaffter
Promilla & Co in association with Bibliophile South Asia,
New Delhi and Chicago, pp.308, Rs. 650.00

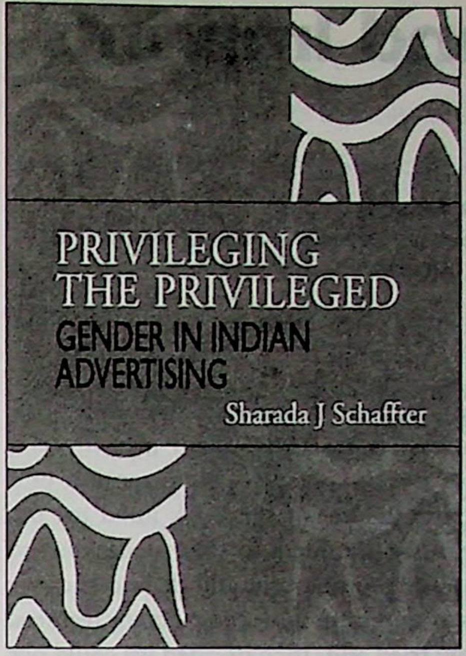
The deleterious impact that the repetitious 'drip feed of media material' has on the human mind and behaviour has been fairly substantially assessed over the years. In the book under review, Sharda J. Schaffter, a communication analyst, has attempted to study how advertising in India has privileged the privileged and, consequently, disprivileged women, the traditionally disprivileged.

Her attempt to catalogue and critique some 200 English language advertisements – 60 in some detail — that have appeared in magazines and newspapers is useful in that such content analysis has generally been confined to the print and television media. Advertisements, perhaps because they have been perceived as material that is paid for – presumably s/he who pays the piper calls the tune — have generally escaped a more careful critique apart from the occasional burst of outrage provoked by a particularly offensive specimen. But since advertisements too occupy the public sphere and do exercise an inordinate influence on social values and behaviour – indeed are meant to do precisely that – it is important that they too are assessed for their social impact.

Advertisements reinforce both stereotypes and help buttress common sense. John Fiske, quoted in the book, points out that the mass media succeed in cultivating perceptions already present in society, and nurture them. It follows that the images and words they create are based on a process of signification and the creators of the message and its recipient comprehend the connotation of each word and image so privileged. But the hope that Schaffter expresses that critiques such as hers would help further the call to "uphold women's inviolable right to be treated with dignity as human beings" would appear overly optimistic and slightly naïve.

The fact is that advertising reflects market forces which are generally known to be highly resistant to ethical/moral arguments. Two central forces impact on how women are portrayed in advertising—the dominant economic paradigm (capitalism) and the dominant social paradigm (patriarchy). The book suffers from the lack of a comprehensive examination of the first but is slightly more rewarding when it comes to examining patriarchy. Sylvia Walby's comment, cited in the book, is useful. She notes that patriarchy has evolved from being "private and exclusionary" in 19th century Britain, to being public, segregationist and subordinating today. It is also regressive, and Schaffter is quite right to point this out. Regressive patriarchal attitudes influence the regressive messages of advertisers which in turn contribute to the regressive perpetuation of women's subservience.

Many of the examples that are cited in the book are limited to a small minority of English language readers and are also considerably dated (the ads were surveyed over a 12-year period, from 1994 to 2005). Schaffter readily acknowledges these infirmities, but her broad thesis is still relevant. Advertising continues to stereotype women, not just in terms of their preoccupations and occupations, but in terms of their physical appearance. It continues to project men as the authority figures. Even when the male icon is occasionally metrosexualized, and is portrayed as more "feminine" in a touchy-feely way, the voiceover continues to be the voice of authority: male. Only men, it seems, can be knowledgeable about the products that are advertised, only male approval can ensure their survival in the market-place.



There are no surprises in the stereotypes that emerge in Schaffter's study. While the woman-as-home-maker figure dominate in magazines meant for women ("They say a woman's kitchen is the centre of her home. Well, our big, new fridge is designed to be the centre of her kitchen...", Kelvinator); the woman-as-sex-object/eye-catcher image proliferates in the special interest men's magazines ('Admit it. You have always been crazy over topless models' – Mahindra convertible). There is another stereotype that Schaffter flags: women as comprising a lower order of human beings — indecisive, incapable, envious, vain ("If you've spent less than seven minutes on this page, you must be a man", Titan watches); juvenile, dependent, a male possession, a collection of body parts....the attributes are endless. There is also in the book, a fairly detailed look at the "working woman" as portrayed in advertising, with Schaffter concluding that women's capabilities of undertaking responsibilities outside the home are more often than not overlooked.

That the indoctrination begins early cannot be disputed. Advertisers target not just women but girls as desirable companions/future mothers and homemakers. The text for an ad for Barbie dolls says: "Let your love go a long, long way", while another marketed as a Raksha Bandhan gift has the following text: "A rakhi is your little girl's way of telling her brother that he is her hero, friend and he-man..." As female dependence on the male is reinforced, the attempt is to get the child to internalize the "beautiful" passivity of the doll.

Fighting this is a tall order. One of the success stories of the feminist movement of the 1970s and the 1980s was to visibilize the problem of gender-biased advertising and provoke change. For instance, in Canada, those seeking licences to run radio and television stations have to conform to special guidelines on avoiding stereotypes insensitive to women, on the use of inclusive language and on the use of women as voice-overs, presenters and interviewers. Schaffter suggests some additional norms that India could benefit from: ads portraying children should show both sexes; ads for skin-lightening products should avoid negative references to the dark-skinned or imply that having a lighter skin is an inherent advantage (a contradiction in terms, the very existence of skin-lightening products point to a mass perception that lighter skins do have an inherent advantage); that no part of a person's body should be substituted by an object; that ads for jobs and academic opportunities should address both men and women.

Good, well-meaning advice, but extremely difficult to translate into policy given the tidal wave of advertising sludge, the rapidly globalizing markets and the lack of a credible regulatory authority. The real proliferation, in fact, is taking place in a medium that the book doesn't even cast a passing glance at: television. In 2005, viewers in the West saw 484 TV advertisements every week, according to the UK based Initiative Futures Worldwide. India figured lower down the list, but still managed to spew 311 ads every week. The number of ads aired on television in India has actually shot up three times over the past five years.

Codes, if they are to be at all useful in such a complex scenario, will have to be internalized by the creators and consumers of this inundation. They cannot be imposed.■

Pamela Philipose is Associate Editor, *The Indian Express*, New Delhi.

Signposts and Imprints

Maya Sharma

GRASSROOTS NGO'S BY WOMEN FOR WOMEN
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Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 236, Rs. 320.00

There are signposts and imprints in the text and even the subtext that evoked instant recognition having traversed them myself—as a feminist, as a woman and as one involved in the inception of a grassroot organization: the intersecting themes of the book lured me on. The agonized comments of the feminist founders in their endeavour to confirm to a collectivist form to ensure egalitarianism and democratic way of functioning, and the compulsions of adopting some bureaucratic features, " It's not just practical", or " We really tried and then decided we could not continue this way", resonates of a familiar conflict between ideals/beliefs and reality /practice. "The new staff just does not have the same values". It is a book that a number of social activists all over the country would identify with and therefore a must-read for them and all those interested in knowing more about the women run NGOs and even more for those who love stories of everyday heroines, true stories of women living on the edge and making it work for them. A book of fresh perspective on partnerships between women of privileges and the underprivileged.

It is precisely for these very reasons that one wishes the book had explored more deeply the inherent contradictions that emerge: Of working as non-profit organizations on livelihoods of the poor, that leave some margins of 'profits' to enable sustainability, of the largely middle/upper class, and caste and educated women having social capital and working with the vulnerable, and attempting to work out egalitarian structures and values. Seeing themselves not as do-gooders, but as women who empathize with women. The implementation of actions/practices that flow from the fact of women taking their own experiences of being women and relate(ing) it to their clients," (p. 163) is demonstrated through the example of crèches/balwadids being set up. However, the rest of the book offers no example of 'socially-sensitive and controversial issues' (p. 55) in the lives of the founders or the professional staff that would suggest further identification with the oppressed women whose stories of abuse, sexual harassment, divorce, out of wedlock relationships figure in the book. While the fact of women as a whole being the subordinate group in a patriarchal system finds reference throughout the book there are no similar/different stories of middle class/upper caste women bearing the brunt of structural oppression/inequalities. Though embedded, it needed greater articulation and visibility. Especially as feminist organizations and as women holding a feminist ideology, of 'personal is political', one had hoped that the mention of the staff members and clients being encouraged to bring up issues that affected their own family lives would have found a detailed narration elsewhere.

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Sage Publications, Sage Series in Modern Indian History Vol. X, 2006, pp. 471, Rs. 595.00

Antecedents from the Past

Ranjani K. Murthy

LOVE'S RITE: SAME SEX MARRIAGE IN INDIA AND THE WEST
By Ruth Vanita
Penguin Books, Delhi, pp. 370, price not stated.

Ruth Vanita traces some of the pre-modern textual precedents of such unions, and points that same sex marriages have antecedents in traditional narratives. She convincingly argues that while the same sex couples who married may not have known of these precedents, the idea of same sex union was to the couples and their families thinkable and speakable in India and the West.

In much of the world, same sex couples are not legally allowed to marry, or enter into civil unions. Arguments that such relationships are not 'natural', are against the tenets of religion, and are an imposition from the 'West' are often used to make a case against same sex marriages. Inspite of such opposition, same sex marriages have taken place in the last three decades between men and between women in India and the West. Such marriages have not only taken place amongst members of the gay and lesbian movements, but also those who are outside such movements.

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The book unravels several antecedents to same sex unions and marriages. Chapter 3 brilliantly unpacks the belief in Greek philosophies, Hinduism, Christianity and Sufi Islam that the soul is genderless, allowing for the possibility of marriage between two souls through same sex marriages. The chapter also examines the belief that God is male, female and neuter in Hinduism, allowing human gender and sexuality to be also conceived in a fluid manner. The notion of sex change amongst gods and goddesses in pre-modern Hindu texts to allow them to marry their lovers from the same sex is amply illustrated.

Chapter 4 examines how always the practice of 'unapproved' love has existed in India and the West for a long time, even within heterosexual relations (love marriages, inter-class, intercaste, inter-religious etc). The chapter argues that if marriage is a public statement of how the couple intends to stay together, joint suicide can also function as a type of marriage—a public statement of intent to be united forever.

The author examines the notion of same sex 'friendships' that existed in the past. She argues that because same sex friendship in traditional societies has been idealized more than cross sex marriages, same sex marriage today, even more than cross sex ones, is a place where ideas of friendship and ideas of marriage meet. Those who debate about same sex marriages, the author argues, are frequently unaware of the varied history of friendships and its influence on ideals of love and marriages. Friendship rituals are known to have existed in Hindu and Christian mythologies, similar in many ways to marriage rituals.

In Chapter 6 the author discusses whether children are a divine blessing bestowed only on heterosexual couples, or also on same sex couples. Tracing from the Hebrew Bible and ancient Hindu texts she argues that same sex couples have at times been 'divinely' blessed with children. The precedents for same sex couples to produce children through surrogate mothers or artificial insemination, or adopt children are hence very much there.

The next chapter argues that homosexuality has always existed in traditional families. In India, and other traditional societies, the author argues, large numbers of people live as apparently traditional heterosexuals, while secretly engaging in homosexual liaisons. Governments' refusal to legally recognize same sex marriages does not put an end to same sex relationships. Traditional practices in the West and in India of men and women sleeping separately, of polygamy and bonding between co-wives, and of living in joint families and love between sisters-in-law have allowed homosexuality to flourish.

Chapter 8, the main one which explores antecedents to same sex unions in Islamicate and gives a rich overview of female-female unions in a genre of nineteenth century Urdu poetry called Rekhti. Rekhti depicts female-female relationships as institutionalized in various ways, including in marriage like unions. Some of the poems have been translated for the first time into English. Several words exist to describe homosexually inclined women like zanakhi, dogana, illaichi, dost, sahgana and guiyan. The idea that two women in love may marry each other, and one of them take up the role of the husband and the other the wife, the chapter points, is found as early as the second century AD in West Asia.

Chapter 9 explores twentieth century Indian cinema, and notions of love in Hindi songs, and how the lyrics are often genderless and could apply to same sex relationships as well. The author argues that many of the same sex couples—gays and lesbians in India—identify with these songs, though within the specific movies they have largely been sung in heterosexual relationships. Indian cinema is attractive to queer subcultures as it privileges romantic love over all other emotions. Indian cinema has more recently, the author points, started giving attention to same sex relationships as the central theme.

The concluding chapter argues that precedents for same sex marriages have hence existed in traditional texts and practices, and points that how some of the religious leaders from Christianity and Hinduism are open for debate on this issue, and a few are even supportive of the idea of same sex marriages. The reality is hence changing, Same-sex marriages at the time the author wrote the book are legal only in two countries, civil unions in some more, and culturally accepted unions in many more (Chapter 2). Thus in contrast to the textual and cultural precedents, several nation states have taken repressive positions against same sex marriages.

This impressive book, is however, vulnerable to the criticism that it looks for antecedents in pre-modern texts and practices to justify the legal validity of same sex marriages. Are not human rights of individuals to marry persons of their choice inalienable, irrespective of what earlier texts and practices say? The homophobic lobby can equally interpret other religious texts and traditional practices to justify its opposition to same sex marriages.

While the patriarchal state and its opposition, with few exceptions, to same sex marriages has been explored in Chapter 2, the book could have benefited from an in-depth exploration of how same sex relations were played out traditionally within the institutions of marriage, family, markets and community. Were same sex marriages and unions less unequal than heterosexual ones? Did patriarchal rules of the institutions of family and community change—like 'male/son' preference, dowry, patrilocality patrilineality, when same sex marriages or unions took place? What were the rules of labour, commodity and financial markets when dealing with those who were in same sex unions or marriages?

Yet another concern is the equating of antecedents to same sex marriages in India with antecedents in Hinduism. Other than the chapter on Rekhti poetry there is little exploration of what Islamic scriptures and traditions, as well as Indian Christian practices, have to say on homosexuality.

This said, the book is a goldmine of valuable information and a 'must read' for all those engaged in human rights, gay, lesbian, and transsexual movements. Those working on issues of HIV/AIDS may also find the book useful to evolve effective outreach and advocacy strategies. The book is also an essential read for teachers and students involved in philosophy of religion, sociology and popular culture. Spiritual leaders may also benefit by reading this impressively researched and written book. Needless to say any inquisitive citizen, who believes in the intrinsic value of human diversity, will find this book absorbing!

Ranjani K. Murthy is an independent researcher, trainer and consultant based in Chennai. She works on gender, poverty and health.

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Chapter 8, the main one which explores antecedents to same sex unions in Islamicate and gives a rich overview of female-female unions in a genre of nineteenth century Urdu poetry called Rekhti. Rekhti depicts female-female relationships as institutionalized in various ways, including in marriage like unions. Some of the poems have been translated for the first time into English. Several words exist to describe homosexually inclined women like zanakhi, dogana, illaichi, dost, sahgana and guiyan. The idea that two women in love may marry each other, and one of them take up the role of the husband and the other the wife, the chapter points, is found as early as the second century AD in West Asia.

Chapter 9 explores twentieth century Indian cinema, and notions of love in Hindi songs, and how the lyrics are often genderless and could apply to same sex relationships as well. The author argues that many of the same sex couples—gays and lesbians in India—identify with these songs, though within the specific movies they have largely been sung in heterosexual relationships. Indian cinema is attractive to queer subcultures as it privileges romantic love over all other emotions. Indian cinema has more recently, the author points, started giving attention to same sex relationships as the central theme.

The concluding chapter argues that precedents for same sex marriages have hence existed in traditional texts and practices, and points that how some of the religious leaders from Christianity and Hinduism are open for debate on this issue, and a few are even supportive of the idea of same sex marriages. The reality is hence changing, Same-sex marriages at the time the author wrote the book are legal only in two countries, civil unions in some more, and culturally accepted unions in many more (Chapter 2). Thus in contrast to the textual and cultural precedents, several nation states have taken repressive positions against same sex marriages.

This impressive book, is however, vulnerable to the criticism that it looks for antecedents in pre-modern texts and practices to justify the legal validity of same sex marriages. Are not human rights of individuals to marry persons of their choice inalienable, irrespective of what earlier texts and practices say? The homophobic lobby can equally interpret other religious texts and traditional practices to justify its opposition to same sex marriages.

While the patriarchal state and its opposition, with few exceptions, to same sex marriages has been explored in Chapter 2, the book could have benefited from an in-depth exploration of how same sex relations were played out traditionally within the institutions of marriage, family, markets and community. Were same sex marriages and unions less unequal than heterosexual ones? Did patriarchal rules of the institutions of family and community change—like 'male/son' preference, dowry, patrilocality patrilineality, when same sex marriages or unions took place? What were the rules of labour, commodity and financial markets when dealing with those who were in same sex unions or marriages?

Yet another concern is the equating of antecedents to same sex marriages in India with antecedents in Hinduism. Other than the chapter on Rekhti poetry there is little exploration of what Islamic scriptures and traditions, as well as Indian Christian practices, have to say on homosexuality.

This said, the book is a goldmine of valuable information and a 'must read' for all those engaged in human rights, gay, lesbian, and transsexual movements. Those working on issues of HIV/AIDS may also find the book useful to evolve effective outreach and advocacy strategies. The book is also an essential read for teachers and students involved in philosophy of religion, sociology and popular culture. Spiritual leaders may also benefit by reading this impressively researched and written book. Needless to say any inquisitive citizen, who believes in the intrinsic value of human diversity, will find this book absorbing!

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Ethical and Political Conundrums of Gandhi's Legacy

V. Geetha

POSTMODERN GANDHI AND OTHER ESSAYS: GANDHI IN THE WORLD AND AT HOME
By Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph
Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2006, pp. 252, Rs. 575.00

Gandhi continues to fascinate and frustrate those who read him. He refuses to retire peacefully into the archives and asks to be made contemporary. His admirers address the question of his relevance by mining his voluminous writings for meanings they are partial to, as if asking for his grace to be bestowed on their eloquence. Of these, those who are critically inclined towards modernity constitute a majority. They read and re-read *Hind Swaraj* to hone their own discontented critique of westernization and global industrial growth. Gandhi's critics too are not yet done with him: in different contexts and for different purposes they return to examine the fundamental tensions that marked his life and work – especially those that relate to his claims for truth on the one hand, and his political practice which claimed that truth for itself on the other. Of his detractors, the most important undoubtedly have been dalit intellectuals: following Ambedkar, they view Gandhi as a champion of upper caste Hindu interests, and Gandhism as a form of modern ideological enslavement.

While interest in Gandhi has waxed and waned in the decades following his death, it has proved to be somewhat acute this last decade. Several reasons and interests might be cited for this particular turn to Gandhi: the global overwriting of need by want and consumption; the rapid retreat of ethics from the public sphere in India; disquiet caused by dalit critiques of Gandhi; and finally the need for charisma, for an icon in whose name we could afford to lay aside the anxieties of our time. The Rudolphs' *Postmodern Gandhi* might be read as a partial response to some of these developments and concerns. But it is also its own book – it appears to want to claim both for postmodernism and Gandhi a social and ethical relevance. And this it attempts to do by making the one speak to the other.

It is not quite clear why the Rudolphs have chosen to read Gandhi through the postmodern prism, because the Gandhian notions they associate with the postmodern, as they define it, do not really require its sanction to be relevant. It is possible that this is a rhetorical and epistemological ruse, in a strictly heuristic sense, to return Gandhi to our times.

Let us consider, for instance, the checklist of attributes that the Rudolphs have chosen to illustrate the condition of postmodernism. The list includes: a critique of foundational truths, whether of science, tradition or faith; a radical hermenutic that refuses to concede truth to modern science and instead calls attention to the incomplete, contingent nature of 'truths'; an unease with modern institutions, including the state and finally a disillusionment with modernist notions of unlimited progress. Against this list, the Rudolphs propose arguments gleaned from Gandhi – thereby making the one testify to the other.

Gandhi's reliance on 'situational' truth, his idea of leading life, as if it were an experiment, whose fulfilled moments cannot be assumed to be normative for all time are cited as instances of Gandhi being postmodern in an epistemological sense. Gandhi's devastating criticisms of progress and civilization, voiced with great fervour and authority as early as 1910 in *Hind Swaraj*, are also characterized as postmodern, since they provided an early and almost coeval indictment of the modern world and its reliance on instrumental rationality, mindless economic growth and violence. Further,

The Rudolphs' *Postmodern Gandhi* might be read as a partial response to some of these developments and concerns. But it is also its own book – it appears to want to claim both for postmodernism and Gandhi a social and ethical relevance. And this it attempts to do by making the one speak to the other.

Gandhi's reluctance to concede power to the state and his insistence on building civic life and associations are seen as being in tune with the postmodern critique of the state and state power. Each of these analogies is examined in some detail in the first part of the book. Part Two comprises articles that elaborate the efficacy of the Gandhian model – both in terms of the complex regimen of the self that he instituted in his ashrams and its public usefulness. The essays in this section demonstrate his 'postmodernity', so to speak.

However, as we have noted earlier, it is not at all clear or evident why Gandhi's views on progress and modernity, truth and action are fundamentally postmodern. For instance, his defence of partial truths as well as faith in Truth that is God does not appear an epistemological response to an inexorable modernity. Truth mattered to him in an ethical sense and constituted the very ground of action. It was the practical relevance of truth, rather than its contingency that rendered it epistemologically uncertain. Truth inevitably had to be exercised in defined political contexts and as such could not always be free of the impress of action and, therefore, desire. The Salt March, for instance, was both a fine instance of charged moral defiance, as well as a politically astute move that collapsed the certainties of an arrogant empire.

Gandhi, it seems to me, was aware of the taint of politics that all truths suffer from. He struggled to disentangle the moral and the political aspects of truth, but knew all along that he would never be as successful as he wished. Rather early in his political career he ruefully noted that he had to labour hard to be the Mahatma that Romain Rolland wished him to be and one suspects that he did not stop labouring until the very end, when he wandered the refugee camps of a partitioned nation, wondering why he had failed.

Secondly, Gandhi's unease with, what the Rudolphs describe as 'foundational' truths did not merely result in his trusting to 'situational' truths. He worked and reworked what appeared to him given and 'founded' until that truth could accommodate what it had previously neglected or disdained. His monumental claim on behalf of dalits at the second round table conference, that he was their sole representative, suffered a crisis in the 1930s, following the signing of the Poona Pact. This was because, in the course of his conversations with Dr. Ambedkar, he was forced to admit that the so-called untouchable question required a far greater and deeper ethical response and commitment from caste Hindus, and even from him, than he had imagined. The famous 'Harijan' tour of the mid-1930s, and the profound moral anger and anguish that it evoked in him, cannot be imagined outside of this dialogic moment that emerged in the wake of the Poona Pact.

Thirdly Gandhi's critique of industrial progress and modern life, most consistently argued in *Hind Swaraj*, does not quite resemble that ironic and darkly playful postmodern angst that has come to characterize the more profound critiques of modernity. Gandhi's is a fundamentally ethical critique, and therefore constitutively hopeful. It drew, as the Rudolphs note, from the tradition of creative dissent symbolized by the 'other Europe' of Morris, Ruskin and Carpenter and informed by Tolstoy's moral acuity. However it did not merely advance an alternative 'nationalism' in an ideational sense, as the Rudolphs argue. It presented the case for a political position that Gandhi initially advanced in a letter to Lord Ampthill (October 30, 1909),

former Governor of the Madras Presidency and a man sympathetic to South African concerns. In that letter, Gandhi pointed to the revolutionary discontent that had emerged in the heart of empire, in London, and wondered if it was not important for England to redeem some of the discord and violence it had caused by its monstrous policies. Would England be ready, asked Gandhi in this letter, to discard modern civilization 'which is ensouled by this spirit of selfishness and materialism'? Could it at least not impose on Indians the 'modern civilization'?

Gandhi's intent was quite clear: he wished to distance himself from Indian political methods, extreme or moderate, for both appeared to mimic the oppressor's violent methods in their focused instrumentality and he wanted his interlocutors to know this. He wanted them to note the difference that his soul force represented and act accordingly in the context of South Africa. As always, the political and the moral were curiously entangled in his argument. Only, later, when on board the ship that took him home to South Africa, did he rework his political views into a more comprehensive civilizational argument. The point is, Gandhi's disenchantment with modernity was never merely that: it translated into contingent and, sometimes, problematic political choices. He was aware of this and in that letter to Ampthill noted that the information he had provided must be treated as confidential 'and not to be made use of prejudicially to my countrymen'.

The Rudolph's counterposing of Nehru to Gandhi, in their essay on the latter's views on the state and development rehearses an old and well-known theme. However their argument that traces Partition to Nehru's 1929 Purna Swaraj resolution and his scorning of Dominion status appears fragile: if they had examined Gandhi's and Nehru's responses to the Cabinet Mission plan to further hone their argument, they might have been able to offer a more nuanced and substantial perspective on the complex responses that both Gandhi and Nehru held on partition. Further, the argument as it exists does not quite do justice to Gandhi's views on the state. While he was for political decentralization, he realized the need for the state to remain strong and vigilant, should the occasion demand it. We find him saying this time and again as he worked to counter the violence of Partition. He was aware of the subtly evil nature of power, but was not, on that account, willing to accede to an impossible and ultimately indifferent innocence – which one finds postmodern writers sometimes doing.

Whatever the fit – and clearly there is no easy fit – between Gandhi's ideas and postmodern notions, the manner in which the Rudolphs frame Gandhi for our times raises other interesting questions. This is especially true of the essay, 'The Coffee House and the Ashram Revisited: How Gandhi Democratized Habermas's Public Sphere'. The Rudolphs suggest that the Gandhian ashram restated the relationship between the private and the public, by calling for private lives and choices to be re-made in the context of a public good. This approach, they argue, not only expanded the basis of communicative action, as defined by Habermas, but it also provided that much needed traffic between private and public realms. The western bourgeois public sphere, they note, is premised on a separation of the private and public worlds. It hinges on the possibility of reasoned public debate and argument and fears the rule of the mob, both in an ideological as well as political sense. Gandhi, they point out, was equally interested in creating the basis for a broad-based civic culture, committed to the commonweal, but he did not think that one could do this by delinking the private from the public. Rather the private – comprising everyday practices of living, thinking and being – had to be actively transformed and made the basis for meaningful civic action. The ashram, the Rudolphs argue, achieved this for Gandhi and succeeded in bringing ordinary people into the realm of the public and by transforming them into ideal citizens.

What the Rudolphs don't point out, though, is that the Gandhian ashram was not an infinitely open space: in South Africa, Gandhi did not want native Africans to be part of his experiments in living. In India, he did experiment with having dalit families living in the ashram, but it is not at all clear that he could go beyond his initial efforts in this regard and attract large groups of dalits into his fold. In this sense, the public sphere, as he reimagined it, was also necessarily a constrained one. But, and the Rudolphs underscore this marvellously, in his practices of satyagraha, which was his practical model of 'communicative action' he achieved a greater inclusiveness. Not that there were no constraints here as well: he was prone to choosing his satyagrahis and also to refuse the right of satyagraha to those who had decided to undertake it on their own accord – he did not wish Kelappan who fasted in the cause of dalit entry into the Guruvayoor temple to carry through his resolve. But the ideal satyagrahi was necessarily every man, and more important, every woman, if only they would realize this and work to achieve that state of selfless suffering.

The remaining essays in the book—on the Gandhian notion of courage as self-suffering, his recipe for the cultivation of courage and restraining the senses, and his suspicions of power which led him to advance a model of political action that relied on sacrifice rather than seeking – cover familiar ground, but offer refreshing insights into what are clearly ageless themes. The essay on Gandhi and his reception in America makes interesting reading, and points to a legacy that lives on not merely in Martin Luther King but also in the agonizing moral issues raised by men like Reinhold Niebuhr.

Finally: like several books on Gandhi that seek to make him speak for the times, this one suffers from a crucial conceptual limitation: it does not engage his critics seriously, especially Dr. Ambedkar and E.V. Ramasamy Periyar, both of whom complicate, enrich and point to the fundamental – and endlessly fascinating - ethical and political conundrums that lie at the heart of the Gandhian legacy.■

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A Dangerously Flawed Thesis

B.G. Verghese

GANDHI AND THE PARTITION OF INDIA: A NEW PERSPECTIVE
By Kamran Shahid
Ferozsons, Lahore, pp. 224, Rs. 250.00

It is always useful and insightful to review past events in tranquillity after the dust of fevered controversy has settled. Hindsight helps fill in missing details and information that might have influenced contemporary judgement and could lend perspective to what was until then a confused and unfolding narrative. However, far from shedding any new light, Kamran Shahid's "new perspective" further clouds the great issues of the day that he seeks to discuss with a perverse thesis.

Shahid upholds the two-nation theory, which Jinnah abandoned as the mere tactical ploy that it was, after it had served its purpose, when he addressed the inaugural session of the Pakistan constituent assembly in Karachi on August 11, 1947. "If you change your past and work together in a spirit that everyone of you....is first, second and last a citizen of this state (of Pakistan) with equal rights, privileges and obligations, there will be no end to the progress you will make ...You may belong to any religion, caste or creed – that has nothing to do with the business of the state". How true. That is what Gandhi had sought to preach as well, albeit in different language.

Pakistan's own history was to prove the tragic flaw in its founding thesis when Bangladesh broke away within the span of a generation, with linguistic nationalism triumphing over religion. And how does the cycle ever stop, when the dominant minority, once separated, emerges as the new "tyrannical" majority that the residual minorities must now fight and so on until state and society are totally atomized. In other words, by fundamentally denying that plural societies can or should even exist, it extols separatism or totalitarianism and justifies sectarianism (Sunnis vs Shias and Ahmediyas beyond the pale). For Shahid, a united (plural) India was doomed to fail. But does he not want Pakistan to succeed?

It is a bizarre thesis that Shahid expounds. Sample this: "... In order to destabilise the Muslim colour of the Muslim League (the Congress) decided to contact the Muslims directly under an ill-fated 'mass contact' campaign. The aim of the movement was to convert the Muslims throughout India to the Congress creed with the understanding that there was no religious or 'communal issues' (sic) at all between Hindus and Muslims. Congress maintained that the real problem was economic and not communal...". In short, democracy was the real threat and propagating it undermined the "financial', industrial and other economic concerns of the Muslims who were reduced to no more than a religious entity. In other words, Muslims had "interests" whereas Gandhi was only prepared to see them as a religious community which is the only and exclusive political category in which the two-nation theory rigidly cast them. Shahid cannot eat his cake and have it too.

To Shahid, Gandhi was an upper caste Hindu who forged a "strategic alliance" with the "Brahmin Nehru" and "Hindu capitalists" to brake the momentum of "the anti-Brahmin movement led by the Muslim-Lower Caste (Untouchable) alliance" and establish "Hindu hegemony" in India. Proof of Gandhi's Hindu predilections was his constant reference to attaining Ram Rajya (an ideal society and not a religious goal)! Opposing this menace, says Shahid, was Jinnah who sought separate electorates, claimed sole Muslim representation for the Muslim League and veto powers in any coalition or proposed federation, howsoever weak.

Shahid applauds the moderate constitutionalism of Gokhale and Tilak in entering into the 1916 Lucknow Pact with Jinnah. This recognized a separate Muslim identity and addressed its anxieties by the allotment of more representation in the legislatures than their numerical ratio warranted, together with special arrangements to protect their language, religion, education and culture. This compact, based on "realpolitik" was destroyed by Gandhi who "Hinduised politics" and upper caste hegemony and thereby became the "guilty man of Partition". The charge is that Gandhi was powerful enough to lead India where he willed but chose wrongly by falling prey to Hindu orthodoxy and thus became the great divider.

Gandhi used a quaint idiom, was in some ways a bundle of contradictions and could be painfully contrary, even "dictatorial", when his inner voice called. But he is not the caricature that Shahid regrettably makes him out to be. He was what Mountbatten called a "one man Boundary Force" who prevented a worse communal bloodbath than what sadly occurred at Partition. He gave his life for Hindu-Muslim unity.

Gandhi And The Partition of India has got it wrong. It is far from well written and is poorly edited with gaffes like "Her Excellency", in reference to the Queen, and "Sita, wife of the Hindu prophet, Ram".■

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New Pathways of Scrutiny

Jaya Sharma

AN AMERICAN LOOKS AT GANDHI: ESSAYS IN SATYAGRAHA, CIVIL RIGHTS AND PEACE
By James D. Hunt
Promilla and Co., in association with Bibliophile South Asia, New Delhi and Chicago, Rs. 650.00

James Hunt's explorations on Gandhi in this inspiring series of essays are set in a postmodern context and an attempt has been made to recover the real Gandhi from the various influences and events that surrounded him through his journey of life. The author moves between an open admiration, to an objective analysis of the man, and the Mahatma. He seems to project Gandhi as a postmodern thinker, philosopher, and doer too. But Gandhi is and will continue to remain a thinker whose relevance does not freeze in time but he continues to offer ways and means with which one can understand the world a little better. An American's scrutiny of Gandhi is a passionate account of Gandhi's contribution to the evolving of an Indian identity and his own Indianness of thought and action. The work is more of an account than an analysis but an extremely well researched one that raises a host of questions and opens new pathways of looking at Gandhi and offers way to grapple with the Mahatma. For Gandhi even today remains one of the most misunderstood figures yet a very influential figure of the twentieth century.

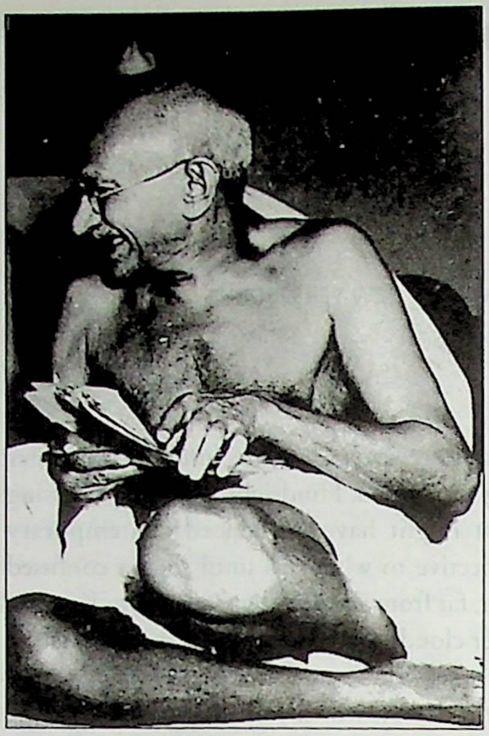
The book traces the journey of Gandhi as a young lawyer embarking on his legal career in South Africa, to the dawn of the Mahatma. The author now lies challenged physically by Alzheimer's but has meticulously woven together the various pieces that appear in the volume assisted by his wife and friends. What sets this book apart from other works on Gandhi is the deconstruction of Gandhi to recover the essential Gandhi that is rooted to his soil and to his tradition. Hunt has primarily looked at the formative years of Gandhi in South Africa as a young ambitious westernized lawyer and the trials and tribulations that follow. The book attempts to unravel what Gandhi took or did not take from his interactions with western thinkers and doers and from his struggles on behalf of the Indian community in South Africa.

There are two central concerns and divisions within the book. Seven of the chapters are a surreal exploration of Gandhi's activities, of his movements and the simultaneous influences of other struggles on his thinking and the emergence of a remarkable leader. The other part is primarily set in an analytical mode.

Appendix I is unique in the sense that it is like a guide map of Gandhi's footprints in London—the roads he walked, the homes he lived in, the places he went to, the people and places that made Gandhi, the man he finally becomes. It offers a description of almost every place that Gandhi mentions in his autobiography. Appendix II engages in a discussion of the dearth of high quality research on Gandhi's biography, particularly his formative years which were extremely crucial and influential years. Appendix III devotes itself to an account of the published works of the author.

The book is both a historiography and a sharp analysis of the very interesting and critical years of Gandhi's life in a very different light. There is no outright eulogizing but there is a great admiration for Gandhi. He throws up new questions and raises the possibilities of reading Gandhi in a manner different from the stereotypical readings.

The initial article in the book documents South African experiments with the development of communities committed to the nonviolent method of social change. The Phoenix and Tolstoy farms mark Gandhi's sojourn towards an ethical way of life which was the quintessence of the ashram communities he later established in India.



Chapter 7 deserves special mention for it unravels the myths that came to envelope an aura around Gandhi and also marked the transition from a young lawyer to a Mahatma. The important point that Hunt is trying to make here is that on occasions Gandhi would deny his saintliness and on occasions he would be happy to present himself in a saintly manner. Hunt quotes from Gandhi's autobiography to examine the myths that came to surround him and Gandhi's own efforts sometimes to deny and sometimes to revel in the same "the seeker after truth should be humbler than the dust" and at the end he says "I must reduce myself to zero. Hunt says that Gandhi's autobiography is a story of a religious seeker and a teacher. Gandhi himself dismissed everything that is for self, for pleasure, for joy—asceticism, frugal and simple living were hallmarks of his lifestyle. The saintly motif is reinforced throughout his life and through his work. Hunt regarded Gandhi's style to be political acts. Symbolic and powerful political acts that had a mesmerizing effect and were powerful educative tools too.

The exploration of the human rights perspective in the context of Gandhi raises important and critical issues at the beginning of the twentieth century. An interesting part of the book is the meeting of two movements, diverse in method but similar in spirit and their quest for democracy--the women's suffrage campaign in England, and Gandhi's nonviolent brand of Indian nationalism.

What is really the most interesting part of an American scrutiny of Gandhi is that after engaging with all the influences of that time on Gandhi Hunt regards him to be a man rooted to his Indianess and rooted to his tradition, and alien to the West but more human and more close to the central concerns of the age. In the chapter 'Gandhi, Thoreau and Adin Ballou, he has brought the significance of the ideas that played on Gandhi's mind and got reflected in his quest for justice and freedom. Gandhi's individuality which stems from his spiritual, ethical and traditional self as an Indian is what one could regard as the most distinctive flavour of the book. He imparts to the Indians and their struggle a great sense of pride and dignity in being different. Swarajya and Swadeshi are an integral part of Gandhi's Satyagraha. Gandhi is seen by Hunt as a nationalist who injected Indians with a sense of self esteem and dignity and thus forged a powerful psychological revolution along with a political one. The importance of recovering the young Gandhi for Hunt is through the satyagraha struggle which he regards as a complex yet exceedingly powerful event which impacted not just the local scene but also had a resonance in the capital cities of Pretoria, London and Calcutta too.

Hunt makes an important point when he raises the context of Gandhi's years in South Africa as grossly under-researched as also the need to research on persons close to Gandhi like Henry Polak. He very rightly points out to the paucity of full fledged biographies especially for the early period from 1893 to1914, the truly important years to understand Gandhi. Millie Polak's *Mr. Gandhi—The Man*, to Hunt is the most intimate glimpse of his personal life during the South African years, "a memoir of an Englishwoman, a loving friend, who keeps her independence of judgment".■

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Making and Remaking the World

Pratap Bhanu Mehta

EXPERIENCING THE STATE
Edited by Lloyd I. Rudolph and John Kurt Jacobsen
Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2005, pp. 382, Rs. 675.00

The anarchist Prodhoun once famously denounced the state in the following terms: "To be governed is to be at every operation, at every transaction, noted, registered, enrolled, taxed, stamped, measured, numbered, assessed, licensed, authorized, admonished, forbidden, reformed, corrected, punished. It is, under the pretext of public utility, and in the name of the general interest to be placed under contribution, trained, ransomed, exploited, monopolized, extorted, squeezed, mystified, robbed; then at the slightest resistance, the first word of complaint, to be repressed, fined, despised, harassed, tracked, abused, clubbed, disarmed, choked, imprisoned, judged, condemned, shot, deported, sacrificed, sold, betrayed; and to crown all, mocked ridiculed outraged and dishonored. That is government; that is its justice, that is its morality."

In a way, Proudhon captured the aspirations of the state as well as any body, particularly the way it first, epistemically classifies them and then subjects them to its own fancies. *Experiencing The State* is too bland a title for this interesting and passionate collection of essays. "Experience" is a complicated term. It suggests a volume that delineates what various people feel about the state, the way in which it impinges upon our life worlds and sense of identity, the way it impresses upon us. Many of the essays, with some exceptions, focus on these themes, but mostly from a particular angle. The essays do not collectively amount to an account of how the state is experienced in all its complexity. They rather describe in vivid detail the way in which what are known as high modernist states literally seeks to make and remake the world in its own image. This is the state that above all believes in control, subjecting citizens to its own disciplinary requirements, subordinating their existing life worlds to its own future utopias, and arranging and rearranging people according to its designs. Of course much of this control is as much an aspiration as a reality; the state's own designs often subvert themselves. But even when the state is unsuccessful by its own lights, its impact is always powerful. It is indeed the great Leviathan. But its main aim is not protecting but displacing citizens, not the source of order but purveyor of a fantasy of order, not an instrument for the pacification of violence but the true source of violence, not a guarantor of rights but its biggest violator, not an agency for the delivery of public goods, but often an instrument of a private will to power. If you want an indictment of the state, this volume will give it in full measure.

But isn't there a distinction to be made between a liberal state and more totalitarian or authoritarian varieties? Much of this volume argues a difference of degree, not of kind. Even the most so called liberal states share three aspects of the totalitarian aspiration. The modern state, even in its liberal form, has an inherent suspicion of ongoing intermediate forms of life. The individual it seeks to protect has to be *created*, by disembedding them from existing social structures and life forms. Second, for all its claims to honour the dignity of the individual, the liberal state also uses them *instrumentally*, as mere cogs to be sacrificed for development. And finally, even liberal states are severely limited in how much they tolerate dissent and diversity in the world. Their foreign policies, their actions overseas, their penchant for creating binary distinctions between friends and enemies, are almost as bad as that of any other state.

James Scott's essay sees the Tennessee Valley Authority, not as the precursor of a progressive welfare state, but as an instrument of oppression that subjects citizens to ubiquitous surveillance. Even when the state acted with good intention, it marginalized the needs and aspirations of those who were affected by its actions; its philanthropy was destructive in its effect. Arundhati Roy's essay looks at the way in which the state imposes its own mythologies on citizens. One such piece of mythmaking on this view is the state's promotion of big dams. These dams not only do not bring the intended benefits, the rehabilitation packages on the basis of which they are justified fail to materialize, and the interests of the relatively powerless are sacrificed to the machinations of powerful urban lobbies. The technical debate over the benefits of big dams is surely a more open question than Roy acknowledges, but the process does often represent the state at its worst.

Hyung-min Joo's essay is theoretically the most interesting and recounts the collapse of the Soviet Union. It creatively uses Karl Polanyi's insight that self regulating market systems produce great social dislocation and in turn give rise to forces that call for its regulation. In a way the collapse of the Soviet Union was a reverse movement. A totalitarian state, wanting to regulate all of society and subjugate it to its own plans put enormous pressure on the life worlds of citizens to the point they became unbearable. Most citizens responded to this by creating their own parallel society and economy even at the same time as they were publicly going along with the aspirations of the state. But total control, by encouraging people to create a shadow economy, created the conditions of its own demise. While it is certainly debatable whether the collapse of the Soviet Union was a result of the rise of the shadow economy, or a result of the fact that its leadership lost the will to rule, the central point of this article is powerful. Each form of the state, whether lassiez faire, or totalitarian, creates the conditions that subvert it from within.

Paul Brass's article, a passionately written but argumentatively weak polemic is a no holds barred critique of the Indian state and almost everybody who has tried to study it. The state's development project for him is morally unconscionable, inherently full of violence. And almost all scholars of development from Myron Weiner to the Rudolphs, end up disguising this violence in one way or the other. This essay is weak because it is fundamentally confused. At one level it seems to argue that the problem with the Indian state is that it does not bring development to most people; at another that development itself is the problem. Its characterization of the scholarly fraternity is high on self righteousness and low on careful analysis or analytical clarity.

In contrast, three essays, by Berking on experiencing reunification in an East German Village, Sidiqqui on bureaucratic rule in Pakistan and Oldenburg on a grass roots view of the state in Ghazipur give a nuanced view on how complex the operations of the state are on the ground. Berking in particular, gives a good account of how social and economic relationships in East Germany did not quite conform to the model the reunified state wanted to impose upon it, and how elements of the erstwhile socialist system continued to have salience for village life. Few scholars know the Indian state as well as Philip Oldenburg and he is a master of political anthropology: giving a thick description of how the sinews of power actually operate at the local level. But his essay is the only one in the book that shows how vital the state is to the well being of many citizens.

Nicholas Temple's essay gives a nuanced account of the way in which larger ideological shifts from Conservatives to New Labour can impinge upon the provision and meaning of health care. The slow dismantling of Atlee government's welfare state ideology by market radicalism is simultaneously a reconstruction of how the state thinks of patients. Rather than being citizens who are the state's responsibility, citizens are now seen as responsible for their own condition, making the relationship of patients with the state even more adversarial. John Jacobsen's essay argues that American Cinema breeds cynicism about the state. While his reading of particular films is interesting, the argument about the uni-directional impact of American Cinema is rather overblown: after all which other state has also so effectively been able to mobilize its citizens? Patricia Bickers reflects soberly on the different ways in which the French, American and British States configure their relationships to art.

Sudipta Kaviraj has a beautiful essay on Gandhi's use of the protocols of trials to vindicate his own position. Bruce Cummings gives a searing account of the operation of American power overseas in Korea, and its consistent use of violence. It also gives a disturbing account of one scholar's own brushes with the American state that should make us all less complacent about how the temptation to use state power to harass those who exercise freedom exists even in democracies. And finally, as is appropriate the editors given an interesting series of ruminations on the post 9/11 state. Contrary to scholarly predictions, state sovereignty has reasserted itself with a vengeance. We are all unclear about whether this is a good thing or a bad thing. But if the tenor of this volume is anything to go by there is something fearful about the lack of fear we have of the state.■

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Mystifying Multiple Identity

T.K. Oommen

IDENTITY AND VIOLENCE: THE ILLUSION OF DESTINY
By Amartya Sen
Allen Lane (an imprint of Penguin Books), London, 2006, pp. xx+215, price not stated.

One of the points which comes for persistent comments in the book is the phenomenon of multiple identities. (In fact identity, role and value orientation are often conflated but I shall let that pass). This is an obvious fact; indeed commonplace. Even if one confines one's analysis to the institution of family it is clear that a woman can be at once a wife, mother, grandmother, mother-in-law, sister, sister-in-law, daughter, daughter-in-law to list a few.

Professor Amartya Sen interrogates a large number of ideas in currency in the contemporary world including the tendency to categorize individuals and communities based on one overarching identity, clash of civilizations, multiculturalism, the presumed superiority of the West, terrorism emanating from religious fundamentalism and the like. As a review is constrained by limitations of space I shall rest content by discussing some of them.

One of the points which comes for persistent comments in the book is the phenomenon of multiple identities. (In fact identity, role and value orientation are often conflated but I shall let that pass). This is an obvious fact; indeed commonplace. Even if one confines one's analysis to the institution of family it is clear that a woman can be at once a wife, mother, grandmother, mother-in-law, sister, sister-in-law, daughter, daughter-in-law to list a few. If the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law is widely perceived to be tension generating, the relationship between mother and daughter is usually not. As the canvass of an individuals' sphere of activities expand to neighbourhood, work, recreation and worship her 'identities' increase. And it is indeed simplistic to identify an individual in terms of one master identity or role and hence one need not labour this point.

What is true of individuals is also true of groups and communities. But there is a critical difference; while the integrity of the unit of analysis remains intact in the case of individuals, the group/community gets distributed into different categories. A religious community usually belongs to different linguistic groups and regions, classes and occupations, age and sex groups. To categorize a group/community exclusively in terms of one of the above features is not to deny that it has a conglomerate of attributes but to highlight its differences with other similar groups on a particular attribute. Thus different classes, age-groups, races, religious communities, linguistic groups, occupational groups etc., are juxtaposed. But they do share critical minimum common attributes. Thus a religious community has shared canonical rituals in spite of its numerous internal differentiations.

Given the announced purpose of the book (although it arrives rather late) it is necessary to ask and answer the question which of the identities are instrumental in fomenting violence? Sen writes: 'The subject of this book—ideas of identities and their relation to violence in the world—is closely linked...'(pp.149-50). It is absolutely clear that the violence generated through interpersonal role-playing (identities?) is not the focus of the book, but identity-clashes between groups, notably religious communities, form its kernel. Therefore, to understand the link between identity and violence the attention should shift from individual identity to collective identity. One of the recurring themes discussed at length in the book is that of 'clash of civilizations' by Samuel Huntington.

Huntington's thesis that the contemporary world is characterized by clash of civilizations based on religious collectivities anchored to geographic regions is empirically wrong for several reasons. First, ever since the geographical explorations of the 16th century and colonialism which followed it the co-terminality between geography and religion is substantially disturbed; de-territorialization of religion is an accomplished fact. Second, all religious communities are internally differentiated based on denominations and sects and the clash between them (eg., Shias and Sunnis, and both of them vis-à-vis the Ahmedias among Muslims or Catholics and Protestants among Christians to cite just two examples) could be more virulent. Third, the clashes also trigger off and persist *within* the civilizational regions as manifested by the cases of Ireland, Sri Lanka and Kashmir. Fourth, some of the most bloody clashes are between peoples who belong to the same religious denominations; both Hutus and Tutsis are Catholics. Therefore, Sen is correct in his conclusion that '...the "civilizational" approach to contemporary conflicts...serves as a major intellectual barrier to focusing more fully on prevailing politics and to investigating the processes and dynamics of contemporary incitements to violence' (p.43).

Collective identities as such do not produce violence but when they are linked to state-making and nation-building they do. The colonial states produced or favoured the construction of a series of dichotomies, civilized versus savage, white versus black, occidental versus oriental, stigmatizing the latter in each of these pairs. If in the New World—the Americas, Australia and New Zeland—both genocide and culturocide (systematic liquidation of cultures of the smaller and weaker groups) were indulged in, in Black Africa, through a process of reckless vivisection of tribes and apportioning them to different colonial states of Europe the integrity of African nations were endangered. In Asia a process of stigmatizing the ancient civilizations was the instrument invoked. Sen hardly pays any attention to this although he rightly castigates the West for its claimed superiority.

Collective identities, particularly national identities, were either privileged or stigmatized by Marx and Engels in the process of establishing socialist states based on proletarian internationalism. According to them Germans, Italians, Magyars and Poles represented the forces of enlightenment. Russian and Slavic nations represented the dark forces. The two most 'scoundrelly nations on earth' were the Chinese and the Yankees. Marx and Engels referred to the less developed nations as 'people without history', 'remains of nations', 'ruins of people' and so on. Great nation chauvinism played a significant role in the breaking up of socialist states.

Project homogenization pursued by the much acclaimed nation-states of West Europe also produced enormous violence anchored to collective identity. The first nation of the world, namely Britain, completely decimated the linguistic identity of Scotland, Wales and Ireland. France, the land of revolution, had culturally liquidated Alsatians, Bretons, Corsicans, Occitanians and vivisected Basques and Catalans between the French and the Spanish states. When modern Italy emerged only three percent of people spoke Italian and the populist cry was: "We have Italy, we need to create Italians now!"

The point I am making is that state building—colonial, socialist and national—produced enormous violence anchored to collective identities. Therefore, one legitimately expected an analysis of these in a book on identity and violence. And Sen's silence regarding the European violence, both socialist and nationalist, is indeed intriguing. This brings me to the discussion on contemporary terrorism in the book. Politicization of religion, be it of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam or Judaism, produces violence. But when the religious category in question does not endorse a territorially anchored nation-state the dynamics of violence—its genesis, sites, spread and manifestation—vary. In Islamic theology, nation is an alien concept and the Islamic identity conceptualized through the notion of Ummah is a universal identity. Therefore the martyrs of faith are not obliged to defend the territory of the nation but are expected to protect co-religionists and avenge the enemies of faith everywhere. This probably explains the spatial

spread of violence through the 'true believers' of Islam. But this does not warrant the characterization of the whole community of Muslims as violent or terrorist.

As most writers Sen too is primarily concerned with physical violence although structural violence too is recognized. But a third type of violence, namely symbolic violence, analysed at length by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu is pivotal in understanding collective violence. The fleeting reference made by Pope Benedict XVI, in September 2006, to a negative articulation made by Manual II Paleologus, the 14th century Christian emperor of Byzantine, about Prophet Mohammed led to massive collective protest all over the world. Similarly, neither *The Satanic Verses* nor *The Davinci Code* indulged in physical or structural violence but both committed symbolic violence leading to violent responses.

Multiculturalism does not refer to celebration of every form of cultural inheritance; it does not endorse cultural relativism, which is the tendency to uphold cultural purity irrespective of the content of cultural practices. Thus practices such as sati, untouchability, racism, slavery, genital mutilation and the like which might have been integral aspects of one or another cultural tradition are not admissible under cultural pluralism. In fact culture change implies four interrelated processes. If reckless homogenizaiton and traditionalization foments violence, pluralization and hybridization brings about harmony. The point to be underlined is change attempted through imposition of culture by the state or the cultural mainstream is the source of violence; voluntary acceptance of culture change does not usually lead to violence.

Does globalization produce violence? If globalization simply means connectivity and spread of ideas it always existed, although earlier connectivity was not complete and less intense. The crucial difference between contemporary globalization driven by aggressive market operations and high technology is that it is hegemonic as compared with the connectivity of an earlier era characterized by equity. Thus historian Abu-Lughod reports the existence of several circuits of connectivity in 13th century without anyone dominating; indeed a stark contrast to today's uni-polar world. And Samuel Huntington wrote in his 1992 article which he published before the book: 'To preserve Western civilization in the face of declining Western Power, it is in the interest of the U.S. and European countries… to maintain Western technological and military superiority over other civilizations'. Therefore, those who protest against globalization have good reasons to protest. While market fundamentalists advise the less developed countries to 'catch up', the anti-globalizers advocate 'opting out'. The real option seems to be pursuing the middle path, 'globalization with a human face' to quote Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh. As Sen concludes globalization need not be perceived as a western curse, it could be seem as an Eastern gift, if one views it from an earlier baseline. A retreat into the present can be myopic.

Finally, a word about 'cultural federalism' which Sen rejects. Invoking the example of Indian subcontinent he argues that religion was the basis of Partition riots in 1947 and language provided the motive for riots in 1971-72 in partitioning Pakistan. This means if any factor, be it religion, language or race, is invoked as the basis of perpetuating dominance in a polity it will irretrievably strain and even occasion the break up of the polity. This seems to be what is happening in Pakistan and Sri Lanka today to refer to only two of India's immediate neighbours. On the contrary, if linguistic units within the polity are accommodated with equity, the polity may not only survive but thrive. This is exemplified by the examples of the 'Union of Indian States', to recall the constitutional expression and the European Union which are indeed instances of cultural federalisms. These are qualitatively different from the fashionable advocacy, 'living together separately', which will inevitably lead to divorce leading to violence. We need to foster political federalism, cultural pluralism, economic equity and social equality the combination of which will sustain authentic democratic polities.

Identity and Violence interrogates a collage of contemporary ideas by a world-class intellectual. It deserves to be read widely not so much for the answers it provides but for the questions it raises.■

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Reframing Hindutva Violence

Pradip Kumar Datta

ROUTINE VIOLENCE: NATIONS, FRAGMENTS, HISTORIES
By Gyanendra Pandey
Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 228, Rs. 595.00

A new book by any member of the early Subaltern Studies collective remains an eagerly awaited event – even when it consists, in the main, of already published essays as this one. Gyanendra Pandey has, of course, been a leading historian of modern India and given continuing and ample proof of his reputation by producing books and articles that have been provocative, original and densely described. Specifically, he has written densely detailed and carefully analysed narratives that have informed—and elaborated—key theoretical concerns regarding the relationship between subaltern initiatives and elite normalization of these, the social multiplicity and displacement of identities, the problems of memory and historical narrative and so on. Judged by the high standards that he has himself set, *Routine Violence,* a little disappointing for its offer of generalized insights and arguments into history and violence— which is clearly its main preoccupation – is not sufficiently rich to compensate for the denuded texture of historical description that was a challenging feature of his earlier narratives.

Although the title – and the effort – of this collection is to frame violence globally, the energy of the book clearly derives from confronting the intellectual problems raised in the late 1980's and 1990's by the ascendance of Hindutva and the domination of the national level political agenda by communal identities, specifically the questions raised by communal violence. For Pandey these problems pertain to issues of historical evidence and composition, the historicized discourses of communal violence, the construction of a (Hindu) Indianness out of tense negotiations with and subordination of alternate community identities and the question of secularism. Flagging off the collection is an expanded version of his 'fragments' article that had spawned a fair amount of debate when it had first appeared. The next two essays elaborate the idea of the fragment. Pandey's polemical target in all three is what he evidently regards as the dominant historiography, that is, the historical narrative of the secular nation state. Against this he poses the need for the subaltern historian to recover fragments that would resist and splinter the homogeneous history of the nation state. This framework of the argument is elaborated differently in each of the three essays.

In the first essay, Pandey argues that by celebrating the nation state and by adopting the archives (the institution par excellence of the state) as their main (if not only) source, historians have marginalized the violence imbricated in our history. On a complementary ethnographic register, Pandey shows how the memory of survivors of the Bhagalpur riot of the 1980's is colonized by the nation state, while academic and activist reports displace the constitutive element of violence by an array of explanatory devices such as claiming that it was introduced by outside agents, by seeking explanations in the economic context and so on. Implying that the very search for 'rational' explanations may itself normalize, if not delete, the role of violence, Pandey seeks to recover the emotional, experiential impact of riots in the 'fragment' which, in this essay, is shown to manifest itself in a literary composition produced during the riots by a local poet. In the next essay called 'The Nation And Its Pasts' Pandey takes up the "scientific, nationalist" critique of Subaltern Studies made by Irfan Habib and K.N.Pannikar which accuses these historians of attempting to fragment the idea of the nation state by privileging the multiple histories of collective identities. Pandey counter-polemicizes against this critique by claiming that its assumptions not only derive from a defence of the nation state but also

The book may not offer fresh methods or new areas of study, but it is essential reading for those who wish to update themselves on the concerns and practices of history writing in present day India.

involve a conservative defence of traditional history. Against their history Pandey again invokes the idea of 'fragment', but this time deploys it to describe the 'subaltern' strategy of writing differentiated histories drawn from odd, resistant material from the archives, non-official sources, interactive interview sessions and so on. The final essay of this group is entitled 'Monumental History' and contains a critical discussion of the hybrid history of Hindutva. He concludes that Hindutva history is actually rooted in the same assumptions of secular history, that is, on the defence of the unitary nation and the valorization of facts. I may add that Pandey's assertion seems a little forced here since it has to suppress the importance of the 'magical' elements of the Hindutva discourse in order to prove itself.

The second thematic that Pandey takes up is of Hindutvization of the state and this is the subject of the next two essays. In Chapter 5, entitled, 'The Question of Belonging', Pandey sketches out the representational devices used by Hindutva to produce a homogeneous nation of which the upper caste (possibly North Indian) Hindu male is the normative constituent. Pandey dwells on the trope of battle that organizes the history of the country as the story of embattled Hindus and locates the function of the temple as a way of countering the uncertainty about the category of both Indian and Hindu. It is in this light that Pandey sees Savarkar's fetishization of naming, that is, as a way of fixing the ever-changing history of the meaning of the word Hindu. Pandey evidently regards the formulation of Hindutva as a critical turning point in the homogenizing of 'Hindu' and 'India' for he observes that it was not until the 1920's (the period when we see the ideological formulation and institutional consolidation of Hindutva) that the uncertainty regarding who made up the nation was removed. This point may be further inferred from the next essay called, 'Marked And Unmarked Citizens' which takes up the moment of partition to look at the categories and procedures through which the conceptions of majority and minority were institutionalized. Pandey looks at the popular discourses, vigilante state action and juridical procedures by which the Hindu was normed as the representative of the nation while the Muslim was defined as one who had to constantly prove his loyalty. Finally, in a very insightful section, Pandey takes up the cases of those who vacillated between Pakistan and India to indicate that the space for the revision of choices (which, it may be assumed, is something attendant on the recognition of multiple affiliations) was one that was completely erased in this period.

The final section concerns the processes and conditions that define communities and the terms of their interactions. The essay 'Cognizing Community' tries interestingly to explore this question through the relationship between the dalits and the Hindus in temporally different conditions of community construction. Besides the institutional and fixing of caste by the census and the compulsory forms of community making such as the forcible retention of the low castes in India during the Partition, Pandey explores – through the Gandhi Ambekar debate—how the resulting community forms were nevertheless problematized and contested. Pandey's reading of Ambedkar is interesting since he sees him as differing from Gandhi not just in regarding untouchability as constitutive of Hinduism (and the dalits as separate from the Hindus), but in his universalistic commitment to social justice. Pandey ends with the present, this time framing it by the history of conversions which shows that the newly converted still suffer from their earlier disabilities of social inequality and discrimination.

In his last essay Pandey takes up the issue of 'The Secular State?' Actually this is not so much an essay on secularism as an attempt to complicate the idea of toleration (or conceptions proximate to it) that has been offered as an alternative to secularism by its critics. The core of Pandey's material in this section is the famous *EPW* issue on secularism although he naturally includes the contributions of Gandhi, Nandy, Madan and others. The substantive criticism that Pandey mounts of the move to begin with communities—and the prospect of mutual dialogue between them - as the basis of evolving peace and understanding between the different religious communities is that it does not stop to consider who names the communities. Further, this conceptual path overlooks the fact that neither communities nor their relationships are stable. Through a critique of the Gandhian position, Pandey also underlines the problem of stabilizing hierarchies between communities that could also be involved in the idea of toleration. While this particular discussion is illuminating, one misses an engagement with the revisionist secularism of Rajeev Bhargav and Amartya Sen that would have certainly yielded a more comprehensive insight into the problem of addressing community antagonisms. Be that as it may, in his concluding part Pandey suddenly jettisons the main line of his argument to show how, from Partition, the state has been homogenizing communities on the lines of majority and minority, a process that has reached a new level of intensity with the "war against terror" and the securitization of the state. He ends with the hope that people may be persuaded to regard the real `majority' of subaltern communities as simply multiple communities that cannot be unified by an overdetermining other. A nice thought, although with Pandey's narrative construction of a state bent on an ever accelerating—and effective—intensification of homogenization, one is left to wonder where the reader could ever locate the grounds for thinking this prospect.

If what I have just said sounds flippant, it was not meant to be, for the comment really indexes what I feel is a certain unresolved ambiguity in the book between privileging homogenization and the valence given to the processes of internal contestation. Let me start with the notion of fragments. There are at least two conceptions involved. In the reputed 'fragments' article Pandey locates fragment outside the structures of state (the archives), the community (whose memory of violence is fashioned by narratives that beseech help from the state) and civil society organizations (such as the PUDR investigative team of which Pandey was a member) in the literal fragment of some poetic lines that embody the experience of pain, uncontaminated by the domain of reason. If fragments here indicate a certain romantic notion of a marginal location, far removed from the state and its tentacles, in the next essay Pandey equates fragments with the early subaltern narratives of multiple histories. This idea of fragments suggests that these are embedded within (to extrapolate from the reading of the nation by the early subalterns) structures that claim to be homogeneous. This ambiguity between a fragment as located in an outside, that is, in a different discoursive location, and one that can be grasped within existing 'sources' of historical reconstruction can be seen, for instance, in Pandey's understanding of the archives. In the "fragments' article it exists as a simple institution of the state which does not provide any opportunity to use it against the grain of its founding assumptions. In the following piece however, Pandey includes the archives as one of the places which can yield fragments that resist the grain of homogenized historical narratives. I should add, that this catholic use of fragments sometimes functions ironically in Pandey's narrative to play a homogenizing function: thus, for instance, Bipin Chandra (who is committed to a straightforward invocation of nationalist history) is conflated with Sumit Sarkar (for whom there is a recognition of plural identities together with a stated desire for privileging a political narrative based on class – neither of which really fits the nationalist bill).

Another related issue is that of Hindutva and the nation state, although here the problem may be one of insufficient attention paid to the ambiguity that exists between the two. Put simply, Pandey tends to read Hindutva synechdochally as the Indian nation state. It is not as if Pandey is not on strong grounds here: his analysis of the way the Indian state congeals and heirarchizes Hindu and Muslim identities during the Partition and just after is an important pointer to the shared terrain of the two. And there are a number of instances to suggest that the Indian state has since then been pursuing an informal policy of discrimination against the minorities in

many spheres. However, to conflate Hindutva with the state is to make a political formation equivalent to the state. The problem with making this equivalence is that it elides the normative differences between the two as they now exist. The function of this difference can have immense consequences: to declare a formally hierarchized citizenship that is the underlying and incessant motif of Hindutva, is to ground citizenship ontologically, as an attribute of the national soil as it were, which is clearly different from the idea of citizenship by residence. In the first instance, the idea of citizenship would replace the pulls and pressures of different collective identities that marks out democratic polity and squeeze and simplify them into a fixed binary of Hindu and Muslim; in the second, the notion of equal citizenship functions to produce a constant, built-in tension with the policies of hierarchization. In turn this allows different criteria of what is legitimate and not so – that would also produce diverse possibilities of mobilization (hence a campaign for the right to free artistic expression or to protest against acts of genocide would be possible within our present normative political horizons and not under a pure Hindutva dispensation). Clearly, given this difference, the normative function of the Constitution as it exists today, would allow for a polity that would be more proximate to the prospective plurality of communities that Pandey seeks to build than the norms of Hindutva.

Finally, a few words on the deployment of the concept of 'routine violence'. A fundamental problem I have with the use of this notion is that its significance is seen to lie in the grounds that it prepares for the extraordinary violence of communal conflict. Besides the debatable hierarchies of significance that this move implies between the two, there are a few problems of explanation that it causes. Firstly, it seems to prevent Pandey from fully exploring the sphere of everyday violence itself. In the introduction, he indicates different spheres of violence that exists in the everyday (pp.10-12): that of the state (including global agencies) and other political formations (such as terrorism), of social (class, caste, gender based) and religious conflicts. These levels are not however explored in their own terms, as a consequence of which they seem to either work as equivalent phenomenon or as continuous with one another. The second problem is that the reading off from routine violence to extraordinary violence silences the distinction between the two and the questions that this produces. How, for instance, does 'normal' caste\ criminal\ state violence translate into communal violence? Is the violence perpetrated against a dalit in preventing her from using the common resources of a village or urban settlement have the same motives and consequences as that perpetrated against Muslims in Gujarat? If a fundamental distinction is granted here, then the question arises, what are the mechanisms by which caste violence is absorbed into communal violence: is it one of displacement, suppression or absorption? Specifically, is violence a quality like energy that can circulate in different spheres without being transformed itself or is violence inseparable from the meanings and practices that embody it? What makes one tolerate violence and in another instance (as Pandey observes in the case of Gujarat) celebrate it?

In conclusion let me add a proviso to my early notice of disappointment. As my reading of this book may have suggested, it has its own distinctive quality, which is its elaboration of an enormously large range of issues that inform history writing today (of which I have isolated only some). The book may not offer fresh methods or new areas of study, but it is essential reading for those who wish to update themselves on the concerns and practices of history writing in present-day India. And, before I forget to mention it, there are two excellent appendices. The first, which is a reply to a certain Mr. S.D, is one of the best pieces of polemical writing I have read in a while; the other, entitled 'Ayodhya and the State' contains a short and incisive historical discussion of the Ayodhya controversy. All these reasons – even if we discount the simpler one of keeping abreast with the intellectual development of an established scholar – is enough cause for a serious engagement with the book.■

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Fracturing a Community, Hegemonizing Secularism

Padmini Swaminathan

SCARRED: EXPERIMENTS WITH VIOLENCE IN GUJARAT
By Dionne Bunsha
Penguin Books, India, 2006, pp.307, Rs. 295.00

TREMORS OF VIOLENCE: MUSLIM SURVIVORS OF ETHNIC STRIFE IN WESTERN INDIA
By Rowena Robinson
Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2005, pp.261, Rs. 295.00

THE SHAPING OF MODERN GUJARAT: PLURALITY, HINDUTVA AND BEYOND
By Achyut Yagnik and Suchitra Sheth
Penguin Books, India, 2005, pp. 328, Rs.350.00

How does one understand violence, Gujarat, and atrocities against a religious minority? The above books address precisely these themes in their own ways. Taken together one is able to weave a link between the three themes; at the same time the books not only make explicit uncomfortable questions that have persisted but also throw up new challenges that are not yet part of anybody's agenda.

Bunsha provides racy but graphic accounts of the different elements associated with the violence that erupted in the aftermath of Godhra – contradictory accounts provided of the incident itself, the horrendous details of the burnings, killings and assaults with the full knowledge, complicity and backing of the state, the ignominious existence of entire communities as refugees, the further mortification that these refugees were subjected to if they wished to return to their original and legitimate place of residence, and the physical, psychological and irreversible 'borders' that have emerged between and across communities, between generations within and across communities, and across spaces in towns and cities.

"Most riots in modern India aren't spontaneous chaos, but are sometimes planned by vested interests. Often, there is some element of state and police collusion with the instigators, only the degree of state involvement varies. So what was different about the Gujarat carnage? For one, the level of state complicity was unprecedented. Never before has a chief minister instructed top police officials to let the mobs have their way. Never have ministers sat in the police control room and overseen whole-scale slaughter without doing anything to stop it. Never have MLAs defended the accused in court. Never has the top police chief of a city visited an MP's house while it was under attack and then allowed it to burn… Months of violence, institutionalized terror and subordination. Muslims were now second-class citizens. After 2002, political parties don't need another riot in Gujarat – the marginalization of the minorities is complete" (pp.23-24). Bunsha illustrates with examples how the after-shocks of the violence pressed people into crises that pushed some to kill themselves. "They were not attacked, but just as surely destroyed".

Against the backdrop of state and police backed violence, Robinson, in her study, enquires into "how Muslim victims and survivors reconstruct their modes of being brutalized by actual and symbolic violence". The study using qualitative ethnographic methods was conducted in Mumbai and in two cities of Gujarat. An important element emphasized in the study, while it concentrated on narratives of lived realities, is the need to articulate a theory for the backwardness of Muslims and to also account for the 'overwhelming decay' and 'notable lack' of civic services in spaces generally occupied by Muslims whether in Mumbai or Gujarat. Further, a point stressed by the author requiring much research, hard evidence and analysis, is the long-term consequences of riots. To quote the author, "while there is no attempt here to read communal violence as the *cause* of Muslim backwardness, one would like to unravel implications of the argument for a while. Narratives of survivors certainly turn again and again to the role

played by riots in depressing fortunes, changing around priorities, fracturing aspirations, fostering vulnerability and infusing instability" (emphasis as in original).

An important contribution of Robinson's study is the documentation of the differential perspectives on violence by men and women and between women of Mumbai and Gujarat. Women have to face and cope with the violence of everyday life and extraordinary violence, including tensions within and outside the circles of kin and community. "They had to struggle to maintain their own under the not particularly benevolent scrutiny of male community members and elders" (p.147). Beyond a point relatives of deceased husbands were not willing and/or simply not able to assist. Further, apart from the fact that women had to singlehandedly face the tussles to secure compensation/help from the state, they also had to struggle to ensure that such meager resources were not captured by husband's kin or others within the kinship network.

"It is perhaps unsurprising that our women speak hardly of religion, of their Muslim identity or of Muslim politics to do with mandir or masjid alike. Do we simply write off this silence as indicative of the ignorance of women wrapped in domesticity with no knowledge of larger complexities? I would be cautious. Living under the shadow of the savage reality of violence, all the women here are excruciatingly aware, whether or not they make reference to it, of the bitter politics of Hindu-Muslim identity that has rent their lives" (p.148).

The stigma of Muslim identity detracts from addressing the substantive issues of justice, security and rights as citizens. The voice of a woman activist recorded by Robinson sums it up: "What is it to be Muslim today... After 55 years, the question, 'What is your name?' becomes important. We are seen as different, we begin to see ourselves as different. An 'Othering' takes place. We are not just activist, or woman, but Muslim" (p.210).

While Robinson has concentrated on capturing the perspectives and impact of violence on Muslims, Yagnik and Sheth's study in a sense complements Robinson's by mapping the historical growth of the social terrain of Gujarat. In the process they dwell at some length on the theme of Hindutva, its rise and the trajectory it has taken, and most important how this rise has played itself out in 2002 and beyond. The authors provide a very lucid historical account of the growth of Gujarat from the time of the Indus Valley civilization. Here, however, we concentrate in particular on the authors' account of the 'new Hinduism' that has entrapped much of Gujarati Hindu society and which has 'othered' not only the Muslims but also the dalits and the adivasis.

The authors contrast the nature of 'violence' surrounding the post-earthquake relief and rehabilitation with that which followed the communal conflagration in 2002. According to them, the former violence was invisible but 'was a portent as it offered a glimpse of the partisan nature of both the state and the society in Gujarat' (p.277), the latter violence was, however, in full glare of the whole world. The blurring of lines between the Sangh Parivar and the state resulted in legitimate arms of government being bypassed in relief and rehabilitation work. On the contrary the coordination of such work by the Sangh Parivar resulted in overt and covert ways of excluding Muslims, Dalits, Kolis and pastoralists from compensation and rehabilitation.

The authors make an interesting observation on what they refer to as the 'geography of violence'. In mapping the areas that bore the brunt of 'Hindu outrage' following the Godhra incident, the authors note: "The areas where the most intense violence took place also happened to be the places where the assembly seats were dominated by the Congress. This appears to suggest that the violence was engineered with an eye on the forthcoming elections. The BJP strongholds of Saurashtra and Kutch did not feel the same urge to avenge the 'Godhra wrongs' even though they had displayed the capacity to practice discrimination after the earthquake" (p.280).

What is extremely relevant for our discussion here on the three themes that we set out above, namely, violence, Gujarat and atrocities against a religious minority is neatly summed up by the authors in their discussion on the 'Implications of 2002' (p.282). In different ways the other two books discussed above also raise these issues. Yagnik and Sheth refer to three major questions that constitute accountability for any state. First, guarantee and protection of right to life and personal liberties and of properties of all citizens; second, provision of immediate relief to victims and their full rehabilitation; and third securing justice for the victims by bringing to book and punishing all those involved in all forms of violence. On each count, all the books unambiguously provide enough evidence of not just the failure of the state but also the complete complicity of the state in Gujarat in perpetrating violence against the Muslims. Bunsha cites case after case of how victims became the blamed and how their silence was effectively ensured through every conceivable intimidatory tactic. Worse, she also records the fact that in Gujarat, the VHP has a strong support base among the lawyers and that the Vadodara Bar Association filed a contempt of court case against the NHRC for insulting the Gujarat High Court's acquittal judgment in the Best Bakery Case by describing it as 'miscarriage of justice' (p.155). Robinson notes poignantly that the attempts to silence trauma by putting it behind without due space for remembrance or some form, however flimsy, of public restitution, tend to unravel the speech of victims, induce traumatic events and fracture conversation... Though the public may wish to forget, survivors demand remembrance and engagement. In the absence of these, events may remain 'unredeemed and unredeemable' (p.147). Yagnik and Sheth reminisce that "the state has moved far away from the standards of justice established by Siddharaj Solanki who, in the twelfth century, personally investigated the communal conflict at Cambay and punished the culprits and rebuilt the mosque which was destroyed in the violence... (Yet) after the establishment of the separate state of Gujarat, with a democratic set-up, communal and caste riots have taken place without any of the culprits or kingpins being punished by any government of the day. This trend has sent out the signal that the law can be broken with impunity and indeed that the state is there to protect wrongdoers" (pp.284-85).

Reflections by the authors on society as a whole and Gujarat in particular are also equally interesting if not downright disturbing and frightening. As Yagnik and Sheth point out: "Till today there has been no discussion or reflection within the community about the nature of violence that Hindu Gujarati society has shown itself to be capable of. The Sangh Parivar's response to anyone who raises questions about these acts of violence is either to say that they are exaggerations of a partisan, English-language media and so-called human rights groups out to malign Gujarat and Gujaratis" (p.289). Bunsha records in detail not only the role of the different media but also the insensitivity of the media at times to the vulnerability and isolation that drove victims to become hostile to their own cause and case. The increasing participation of large numbers of youth in violence among both Hindus and Muslims is another disturbing trend acknowledged by both community leaders.

The authors acknowledge the secular marginalization and increasing vulnerability of Muslim society in several ways, in which the state has had a major role, through its policies of omission and commission. They are equally aware that, while provisioning of basic services and facilities, including housing, education, vocational training and employment may go some way in reducing disparity and enhancing opportunities, yet the contexts for these functionings are painfully absent today. Nay, with every episode of violence, the stress on identity has overshadowed and even obliterated the Muslim community's claim to existence as democratic citizens. Collectively, the books sketch a vast canvas; at the same time they reinforce in different ways the themes of injustice, marginalization, vulnerability and isolation of the Muslim community, for whom today the legitimate institutions of the state, including institutions such as the Minorities Commission, have lost relevance and meaning.

While Yagnik and Sheth have gone some way towards analysing Hindu Gujarat and the rise of new Hinduism where Gandhi and Gandhism have no place (since the latter critiques western development model—the mainstay of the rising middle-class in Gujarat), the loud message from these books is actually the need to critically study and comprehend Hindu India before it is too late.■

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Deconstructing Monolithic Islam and Homogeneous Muslim Community

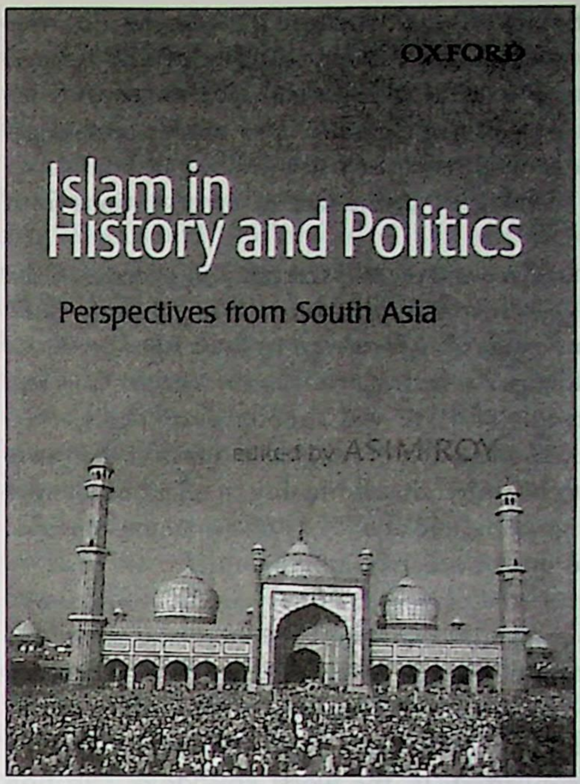
Vinod K. Jairath

ISLAM IN HISTORY AND POLITICS: PERSPECTIVES FROM SOUTH ASIA
Edited by Asim Roy
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 224, Rs. 525.00

In relation to South Asia, the basic story goes like this: Once upon a time, there existed a composite or syncretic culture among the Hindus and Muslims. Then, sometime during the eighteenth or nineteenth century, in some cases even the twentieth century – depending upon the place and the context, the 'frail' composite culture was fractured. The broad trajectory of this fracture was influenced by, one, the conversion and purification movements of Shuddhi and Tabligh, two, by the emerging politics of representation in the process of 'democratisation', and finally by the demand for clear-cut identities by the British colonial government. These changes have increasingly led to support of the idea, which has gained prominence globally, of a monolithic Islam and a homogeneous Muslim community. This, in turn, has encouraged reinventing of histories, emphasizing the natural and foundational separation between Hindus and Muslims. The volume under review here, edited by Asim Roy, attempts to deconstruct the theses of 'monolithic Islam' and 'homogeneous Muslim community' by looking at complexities in various aspects of lived South Asian society where a very large part of the world Muslim population lives.

The volume has seen a decade in its publication in 2006 since the papers were presented at a symposium in 1996. 'The essays included in this volume have, with some exception, been the outcome of the first major international symposium on South Asian Islam held in Australia, presented at the forum of the South Asia section of the Asian Studies Association of Australia Biennial Conference, 1996' (p.x). Some of the more than fifty papers presented at the symposium were then brought out in a 1999 special issue (volume XXII) of *South Asia*, the Journal of South Asian Studies. That special issue was finally turned into the present book because of 'far too limited international accessibility of the journal version of a major contribution of its kind...' The volume has eleven chapters, apart from the Introduction by Asim Roy. The three chapters by Asim Roy, including his Introduction, take up more than one-third of the book. Out of the remaining nine, two essays, presented towards the end, deal with the political history of Pakistan; the other seven are located in colonial India. All the essays do not hold together easily. Therefore we will introduce all of them very briefly.

Roy, in the Introduction, is concerned about the global (mis)understanding of Islamic radicalism. He identifies two basic problems in the explanations offered for the recent rise of Islamic radicalism in different parts of the world. Firstly, it is the mutual exclusion between the essentialist and the instrumentalist views. 'There is an extraordinary degree of vagueness and confusion about what constitutes the core of Islamism, or Islamic radicalism, or political Islam. Opinions are distinctly polarized between the normative, or essentialist view of religiously inspired action and the 'instrumentalist' perception of socio-politically motivated secular source of apparently religious action'(p.5). His own understanding is that 'It is clearly rooted in both religious and secular grounds and is an outcome of both internal and external factors, that is, reasons originating from within the Islamic community and those imposed from outside it'(p.5). Several essays in the volume, including the one by Roy (Impact of Islamic Revival and Reform in Colonial Bengal and Bengal Muslim Identity: A Revisit) present cases to support his view.



The second problem Roy identifies is that '...there is very little awareness of the inner divergences and complexities in the religious contents of Islamism'(p.7). According to him, various debates in the world today '...in relation to Islamic fundamentalism, radicalism, and militancy, have had the consequence of reinforcing the stereotypical non-Muslim image and notion of a centralized, unified, and monolithic Islam......This exclusive focus on a largely imaginary, fictional, and unhistorical Islamic monolith has a critical bearing on Islamic studies....'(p.17). In contrast to this image, he emphasizes the significance of 'historical' and 'lived' Islam with its 'breadth, elasticity, tolerance, and creativity in the process of its historical development in space and time' making it 'a rich, vital, living, and great civilization'(p.17). The diversity within Islam and heterogeneity within Muslim populations is, then, demonstrated through the essays on South Asia included in the volume.

In the first chapter, Francis Robinson asserts that the South Asian Muslims, "along with Muslims elsewhere in the world", started making a shift from other-worldly to this-worldly Islam in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This idea of an empowered self emerged in various different streams of Islamic thought and was, probably, a response to the loss of Muslim power in different parts of the world. In the next chapter, Javeed Alam explores the 'frail' nature of composite culture and its 'infirmities'. It survived as long as it was left alone, without any intervention from above. He discusses various exclusivist interventions, with different motives, which started "roughly from the first half of the nineteenth century". With the fracture of the syncretic tradition, Alam argues that "the militant and politicized forms of the re-worked tradition have completely filled up the public sphere, and the mass mobilization now in the name of tradition, unlike those of Gandhi, are all around these" (p.44). W.H. McLeod (chapter 8) argues that the relations between Muslims and Sikhs remained cordial despite wars and tensions until the eighteenth century when the tenth Guru of the Sikhs, Gobind Singh, and his two sons were killed, followed by the plunder of Amritsar and the destruction of Harmandar sahib, the holiest of Sikh shrines, by Ahmad Shah Abdali in 1762 and consequent retaliation by the Sikhs at Lahore. Thus he traces the 'causes of enmity' between Sikhs and Muslims to the events of the eighteenth century.

There are a couple of papers in the volume which deserve more attention. One is by Ian Copland (Islam and the "Moral Economy": The Alwar Revolt of 1932) and the other by Dominique-Sila Khan and Zawahir Moir (Coexistence and Communalism: The Shrine of Pirana in Gujarat). These are more intensive case studies of composite culture and its fracture, and bring out forcefully the complexities in defining lived Islam and the problems of arriving at clear-cut religious identities. The latter study of the *Imamshahi* tradition (an offshoot of Nizari Ismailism which is a branch of Shia Islam) of Gujarat, centred on Pirana near Ahmedabad, is a fascinating case of a sect called as *Satpanth* (true path) which "admitted among its members Hindus as well as Muslims without demanding conversion" (p.149). In this context, Khan and Moir state that "the figure of the Imam, so essential in Shia and, in particular, in Ismaili philosophy, was associated with Vishnu and his ten main incarnations (*das avatar*)" (p.150). However such syncretic cultural ideas and associated liminal identities have been in the process of being purified and homogenized. 'In the new context which arose before

and after Partition, a major split emerged within the community over questions of religious identity, which, once more, could not be dissociated from issues of power and money" (p.154). The movement from coexistence to division of the sacred space of *dargah/Samadhi* also entails rewriting / reinventing of history. Pirana is obviously not a unique case in South Asia of composite culture and its 'infirmities' in the face of 'interventions from above'.

Ian Copland's paper on the Meos of Alwar is the most impressive in the volume. His analysis of the conditions of this liminal community deals with all the complexities of understanding historical or lived Islam in South Asia. Engaging with the 'middle peasant thesis' of peasant revolt, Copland demonstrates that the Meo revolt of 1932 was simultaneously concerned with class interests and religious solidarity. "If religion is a factor, then so is livelihood" (p.125). It is also to be noted that liminality of religious identity need not diminish the feelings of religiosity. "As Ranajit Guha remarks, "ignorance of scriptures" need not be a barrier to religious fervor" (p.124). Copland also shows the critical role played by 'interventions from above' which resulted in increasing communalization of the state and society in Alwar. "In spring 1947 RSS cadres, assisted by elements of the Alwar army, used the pretext of a second Meo revolt to launch a coordinated pogrom against the state's rural Muslims. Thousands were brutally murdered, thousands more forcibly re-converted, in the worst episode of Partition violence outside the Punjab" (p.136). It reminds one of a similar massacre of Muslims in Hyderabad state in the 1948 'Police Action' and its aftermath.

The essays based in the colonial period of India look at the Muslim issues as concerns of a 'minority'. However, Pakistan, created on the basis of Islam and protection of 'Muslim interests', does not present a very different picture. Adeel Khan (Ethnicity, Islam and National Identity in Pakistan) looks at the contradictions and tensions in the social structure in Pakistan and examines the uses and abuses of Islam as an ideology by the elites. "The areas that were to form the state of Pakistan, after the Partition of British India, had five major ethnic groups, namely, Bengalis, Punjabis, Pakhtuns, Sindhis, and Baloch – each with its own distinct language and culture. To that, another group, Muhajir (literally meaning migrant), was added in the shape of Indian Muslim migrants, predominantly from Muslim minority provinces of north India" (p.181). However the state, bureaucracy and the army were almost completely dominated by the Punjabis and the Muhajirs. "Urdu, the language of 3.7 per cent of the population, was imposed as a national language" (p.185). East Pakistan, in 1948, with a population of 54 per cent, had only 11 per cent share of the civil service. The problem of suppression of ethnic 'Muslim' voices in a highly centralized 'Muslim' state continue to haunt Pakistan polity even to this day. In contrast to the lived Islam which is "based on the syncretic Sufi traditions", "the Islam that is projected by the state, is an ideology, an instrument to deny diversity and difference" (p.188). Samina Yasmeen (Islamization and Democratization in Pakistan: Implications for Women and Religious Minorities) shows how the centralized and militarized state, especially during the regime of General Zia ul-Haq reduced the women and minorities into 'lesser citizens' of the nation by the use of Islam as an ideology.

Overall, the essays in this volume provide support to the already established view which challenges the twin theses of 'monolithic Islam' and 'homogeneous Muslim community'. They also corroborate our basic South Asian story of composite culture and its fracture. What are missed in a volume like this are *intensive fieldwork-based studies* of lived Islam and the complex heterogeneity of Muslim social structure in South Asia which includes Sri Lanka and Nepal. A lot of good work in this area has been done by historians. What is puzzling is the silence of sociologists and social anthropologists in relation to this research area which certainly demands urgent attention.■

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A Juristic Contribution

Saleem Akhtar

BETWEEN GOD AND THE SULTAN: A HISTORY OF ISLAMIC LAW
By Knut Vikore
Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 287, Rs. 595.00

The Sharia is a dynamic living sacrosanct and comprehensive code. It contains the body of rules and legal principles based on the expression of God and concurrence to the same by the Holy Prophet (PBUH). It is capable of accommodating the competing interests of all the people irrespective of their creed, class, caste, or nationality and it also offer solutions for the needs and demands of contemporary society from time to time.

The rules of Sharia have been further simplified, summarized and harmonized with new emerging socio-economic problems by the classical and contemporary scholars with what they thought must be correct solutions to the problems they encountered based on what Muslims generally did, what Prophet had done when that was clearly known and what logic guided them must be an extension and conclusion from these sources. The Holy Quran coupled with traditions embodies the abstract and normative rules of ibadat and Muamlaat but their interpretation, explanation and exposition in the light of given societal scenario and their proper application in a new kind of social instance, have been carried forward by Muslim scholars of different times and places.

The book under review highlights predominantly the valuable juristic contribution of various schools of thought in the process of development and expansion of authority of Sharia law in the diversified field of human dealings from the cradle to the grave. The categorical principles of Sharia Law on numerous subjects and their application in paradoxical instances have been undertaken by the author of the book with complete clarity, authority and authenticity. The rules have not escaped critical evaluation by the author and the principle of harmonizing and moulding the law commensurate with emerging human needs in the light of the Quran and Hadith, the paramount and primary source, consequently finds full expression and exposition in the book under review. So the present book is somewhat different from the traditional books of Orientalists. Although titled *Between God and the Sultan*, it seeks to dispel the doubts of those antagonistic to Islam by its systematic and analytical exposition on various subjects. The author has also successfully attempted to correlate the paradoxical approaches of Shia and Sunni laws on different public issues.

The book commences with a sketchy introduction of Islamic law and human approach of comprehending the principles of Islamic law. Chapter two is devoted to the study of the genesis of law and its application. The Part III of the book deals with the chequered history of Islamic law and its sustained reform undertaken in various Muslim countries like Egypt, Algeria etc.

Chapter 4 of the book discusses the principle of criminal liability and punishment prescribed to be inflicted upon offenders. It also deals with issues like marriage, divorce, inheritance and the misgivings and clarifications about them.

The present book is a modest attempt to highlight the true spirit of Sharia law and will benefit Islamic scholars, historians, law teachers and students.■

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An Islam of Enlightenment

Shelley Walia

COMPOSITE NATIONALISM AND ISLAM
By Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani
Manohar, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 152, Rs. 300.00

THE CHILDREN OF RIFAA: IN SEARCH OF MODERATE ISLAM
By Guy Sorman
Penguin, New Delhi, 2004, pp. 288, Rs. 250.00

Though there are cultural, linguistic and religious differences in India, it is often held that the people of India belong to one nation. Nevertheless, the other day, when I endeavoured to put across the notion of diversity and pluralism in our multicultural society I received strong opposition from a section of my very 'educated' friends. They were clearly supporting Huntington's thesis of the 'clash of civilizations' as we moved to the subject of violence and terrorism. The only thing that was lacking were khaki shorts and saffron flags; the neo-Nazi-like stance was disquieting for it threw light on the future of Indian and world politics. If the educated held such views infused with widely held stereotypes about Islam, what would be the nature of animosity from the man on the street who would so easily and rabidly fall in line? This is a formidable consideration when we find ourselves at a historical moment in the process of major change. Democratization of violence has become the rule of social behaviour.

Most violence finds common ground in religion in the rigidity of the concept of the infallibility of any interpretation coming from the religious authority which is at the head of any extremist movement. Paradoxically, the notion of tolerance which all religions preach is turned into intolerance within the confines of identity politics. The objective in these cases is ultimately that of gaining power and the establishment of a religious nation-state that would not hesitate to resort to even dogmatic violence to impose an orthodoxy to control the social and political life of the people. Any opposition to this would be considered with utmost intolerance as an act of blasphemy only to be castigated and brutally punished.

Though a minority, it cannot be denied that Muslims occupy an integral part of Indian society. They have, over the years, matured as a community and have contributed significantly to all walks of life. But obviously a brand of Hinduism has succeeded in carrying out a persistent discourse of exclusion against this minority leading to discrimination. For instance, there are only two Muslim IPS officers among approximately hundred in the central intelligence services. So is the case with almost all other services too.

These are the concerns of Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani who, through his book *Composite Nationalism and Islam*, tries to unite India, imploring the masses to transcend their cultural and religious differences and fight for the freedom of the nation. His main thrust remains relevant (even) today in the context of the rising waves of communalism that have left the nation bleeding. To be united in overthrowing foreign rule, despite being culturally, religiously and linguistically different and to understand that there is always a political agenda for self aggrandizement that promotes a division on the basis of caste, colour, and religion are primarily his standpoints scaffolding the idea of a composite nationalism.

Madani had been a freedom fighter and the President of the Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind for seventeen years from 1940 to 1957, making a substantial contribution to India's freedom struggle. He belonged to the group of freedom fighters who strongly opposed the Muslim League and the two-nation theory. As Asghar Ali Engineer writes, "The Muslim League which claimed to be the sole representative of the Indian Muslims rejected the concept of composite nationalism and advanced the theory of religious nationalism. In fact the idea of religious nationalism was mooted for the first time on the Indian subcontinent. It was never mooted before anywhere else in the world. Nationalism was so far associated with shared history, culture, language and ethnicity but not with religion. It is also interesting to note, and we have stressed this elsewhere too, that the theory of religious nationalism was advanced by the secular elite of the community and not by its religious leadership."

Madani opposes this theory and makes a case for composite nationalism, but not on religious grounds, arguing that it is wrong to accept the idea that Hindus and Muslims were (are) two different nations. Territory and not religion, according to him, forms the basis of nationalism. The idea of Akhand Bharat or Hindu Rashtra does not cut much ice with him largely because of the underpinnings of the Hindu right wing ideology that is against giving citizenship to the non-Hindus such as the Christians, Parsis or the Muslims. Credit is due to Mohammad Anwer Hussain and Hasan Imam who have laboured to finally give us a definitive translation of this important work.

Another translated work which is of immense significance in today's world of war and fundamentalist politics is Guy Sorman's *The Children of Rifaa: In Search of Moderate Islam* (translated from the French by Asha Puri). As Sorman informs the reader, two Muslims had visited the West; one went to New York in 1948, the other was Riffa sent to Paris by the Pasha of Egypt, accompanied by a battery of scholars, to study the western world of science and see if there was a possibility of reconciling modernity with tradition. The former was Sayyid Qotb, the man behind modern fundamentalism, who during his two years stay in New York experienced racism as well as all the negative trappings of a materialist world view and a jarring women's liberation movement that provoked him into opposing the moral decadence of the American way of life with Islam's power of redeeming contemporary humanity. His antithesis lay in Rifaa who finally concluded after a five years stint in Paris that a synthesis between Islam and progress "was indeed possible and there was nothing in the Koran that opposed the modernization of the Muslim world." It was he who was responsible for bringing about the 'Arab Renaissance' that spread to most of the Muslim countries around the world in areas of art, culture and technology. Unfortunately, his mission was brought to an abrupt halt in the 1950s when the movement towards modernity and democracy gave way to despotic rule and economic retardation. It was the return of Gotb's specter that was to haunt the Muslim world till today.

However, as Sorman argues, there are still the 'children of Rifaa' who believe in a liberal and moderate Islamic ideology that emphasizes the coming together of forces of globalization and Islam if only to counter the backward slide of the Muslim Arab world. Sorman shows what the Muslim world has come to: "In the 54 countries with a Muslim majority, only two per cent of the Muslim population enjoy economic standards comparable to those of the industrialized countries. For the knowledge-based developed countries, one index is particularly disquieting: a tiny country like Switzerland issues more scientific patents in a year than all the 54 Muslim countries put together!' The successors of Rifaa need to counter this economic backwardness, a reform that has to stand up against the fundamentalist rigidity of religious bigotry and fanaticism that has resulted in essentialisms imposed on the Muslim community by the western world.

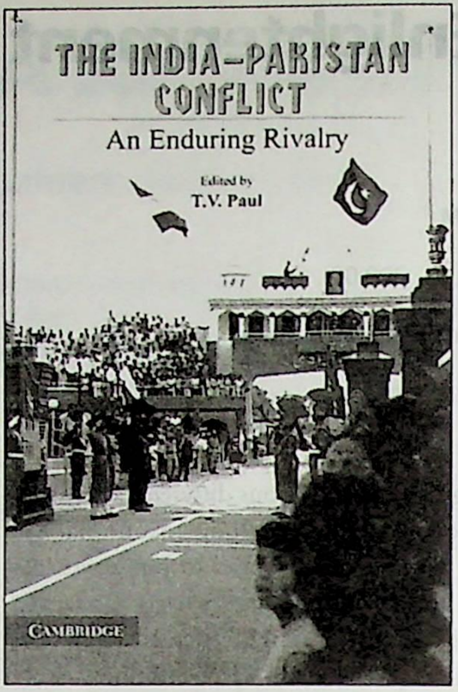
The important question that one must ask is: why do these people feel threatened, and in the face of what kind of opposition to their identity do they take steps which are defensive and compulsively fundamental? Are the Christians not accountable for the escalation of Muslim fundamentalism in western Europe? It is not the question of putting down the threat issuing from a minority of Muslims but to understand the attitude of the majority of the white population which is indirectly responsible for the rise of terrorism. It could, in fact, be argued that there is a legitimacy of all such protests so that it becomes vital to explore the social, economic, and political causes. The indifferent attitude of secular forces to the religious militancy appearing in Gaza or in Godhra is not simply the problem of the Muslims or the Hindu fundamentalists, but also a failing of the Christians in Europe or the Hindus in India.■

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Theorizing an Anarchic Confrontation

D. Suba Chandran

THE INDIA-PAKISTAN CONFLICT: AN ENDURING RIVALRY
Edited by T. V. Paul
Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 273, Rs. 295.00



The common formula of most Indian *masala* movies, irrespective of whether produced in Mumbai or any other regional center is simple: a romantic encounter, an emotional scene, a duet, a fight sequence, a family song – these events are presented in different permutations and combinations in the first half of the movie followed by an intermission. After some coke, tea and popcorn in the lounge, the same events are repeated in the second half. Indo-Pak relations in the last one decade have followed an almost similar pattern – breakdown of relations, a sudden positive development, public euphoria, foreign secretary-level talks, meeting at the highest levels, CBMs, opening of borders and minds and a terrorist attack. These 'historical' events are followed by an intermission and then history repeats again. At least thrice since the nuclear tests in 1998.

How to theorize a conflict and cooperation (or lack of it) that defies logic? How to explain nuclear tests, Lahore summit, Kargil War, Agra summit, Parliament attack, Islamabad summit, intra-Kashmir bus service and the Mumbai blasts? If an enduring rivalry is characterized as a "persistent, fundamental, and long term incompatibility of goals between two states", how would one theorize the attempts to cooperate? How to theorize the relations between the state that carefully and painfully builds relations over a period, at times even at the risk of internal political opposition only to see it crumble in weeks, if not days? How to theorize the popular euphoria and hysteria, which gets as easily carried away with a cricket match as with a terrorist attack?

T.V. Paul's edited book attempts to answer the above questions. A challenging task indeed, as Paul F. Diehl, Gary Goertz and Daniel Saeedi in their well researched essay on theoretical specifications comment that Indo-Pak rivalry is a puzzle for international relations theory makes clear. Perhaps, therein lies the answer; subcontinental politics should not be looked only through the 'international relations theory" prism, which is yet to shift or take in to account the subaltern.

Paul states that the Indo-Pak conflict is enduring and asymmetric and methodically argues on various factors that make the conflict asymmetric. There is an asymmetry in various fields from population to political institutions, but is the Indo-Pak conflict asymmetric any more following the 1998 nuclear tests? Has the asymmetry been broken in terms of the ability to inflict equal pain? Not even once since Partition were there three serious peace processes in Indo-Pak relations in a single decade. Agreed, none of these three processes reached its logical conclusion, but every one of them reached higher levels of cooperation than the previous process. Is there a nuclear parity, which enables both countries to deal with each other more confidently? Is there a slow process of learning to live with each other and reducing the intensity of the conflict? Any discussion on asymmetry should also take into account the above questions.

Second, invariably all the essays focus on and explain the rivalry in terms of Pakistan's efforts as a revisionist state initiating dispute. What is also surprising since the nuclear tests has been Pakistan's interest to start a stalled dialogue or break the deadlock. A related issue highlighted is the asymmetry in the practice of democracy in Pakistan. Paul Diehl and others raise an interesting question on the Kargil War. Was it the first war between democratic states in the modern era? And then there are other related questions of how stable Pakistan's democracy was and how deeply democratic institutions and norms are embedded in society. Reeta Tremblay and Julian Schofield argue that military and democratic regimes and their respective hybrids differ substantially; military regimes have a weakness in terms of getting transfixed on power balance and the rapid escalation of disputes.

Fascinating observations indeed. While analysing these questions, one should also consider some of the measures taken by General Musharraf such as giving up Pakistan's emphasis on UN resolutions on Kashmir and self rule. It is unlikely that any other democratically elected leader would have travelled that path. Stephen Saideman in his essay on irredentism and Kashmir in fact makes an argument on this point saying that a regime type alone cannot be blamed *as democratic leaders of Pakistan have pursued irredentism as strongly as, if not more strongly than military rulers.*

Third, do territorial concerns and disputes form a major factor in the enduring Indo-Pak rivalry? John Vasquez attempts to answer this question in another well researched essay which focuses on various theories of war, rivalry and deterrence. He argues that the rivalry over Kashmir should not be interpreted narrowly as being tied to land alone. It is easy to agree with this proposition; this is why other disputes including Junagarh and Hyderabad did not become a part of the enduring rivalry. The bilateral conflict is certainly not over territory. In the recent years, there has also been emphasis on the natural resources, especially how the Indus makes Kashmir important for both India and Pakistan. Neither the 'land' of Kashmir nor its 'resources' can be seen as a source of enduring conflict.

Fourth, have nuclear weapons changed the structure of asymmetry and are they likely to play a positive role in bringing to an end to the enduring rivalry? Vasquez argues that during the Cold War 'nuclear deterrence did not work alone, but in conjunction with a number of irenic factors'. Comparing with Berlin and Cuba, he raises an important question: *If deterrence almost failed there, where the homeland territory of neither state was at stake, would it not fail at some point for the more salient and festering Kashmir territorial dispute?* Daniel Geller talks about three speculative but plausible scenarios of a nuclear war between India and Pakistan – escalation of conventional military engagement, pre-emptive attack on opponent's nuclear forces and a 'bolt out of the blue' attack impending a war. Russell Leng claims that there are empirical evidences on nuclear crises escalating to higher levels and that Pakistan launched the Kargil operation on the assumption that India would not respond by attacking across the LoC. Saira Khan concludes that the enduring rivalry compelled both countries to acquire nuclear weapons, which in turn has generated a prolongation of the rivalry.

These are undoubtedly valid submissions but perhaps, they should also be analysed through the following questions as well. If Pakistan initiated the Kargil operations, why did it decide not to pursue it further? Why did India after systematically preparing for a war in late December 2001, decide to abandon it early 2002? Should only crisis initiation be interpreted through the nuclear weapons prism? What about non-initiation of military hostilities in a crisis period as it happened during 2001-02? Or an early end to military hostilities as it happened in 1999 in Kargil? Does the mere presence of nuclear weapons lead to deterrence or is it achieved as a result of a painfully slow but steady process? Could the three peace processes and their breakdowns be explained in terms of this painfully slow but steady process?

How to theorize a conflict and cooperation (or lack of it) that defies logic? How to explain nuclear tests, Lahore summit, Kargil War, Agra summit, Parliament attack, Islamabad summit, intra-Kashmir bus service and the Mumbai blasts? If an enduring rivalry is characterized as a "persistent, fundamental, and long term incompatibility of goals between two states", how would one theorize the attempts to cooperate?

Fifth, what are the prospects of peace? Daniel Geller in his essay on prospects for war and peace conclude that the *origins of this rivalry, its intensity of violence, the failure of both mediation and conflict management, and its temporal persistence suggest that the relationship between India and Pakistan is not likely to change in the absence of a "political shock" of substantial magnitude.* Stephen Saideman is optimistic and considers that an important element in the bilateral relation – *Pakistan's irredentism and India's resistance* – may be declining. As mentioned earlier, undoubtedly many of the notions narrowly guided by history and emphasized repeatedly by political rhetoric in both countries are slowly breaking. It would take some more time, perhaps another generation, but clearly there are signs of change, hence the chances of a breakthrough should not be undermined. Vali Nasr's essay provide critical inputs on national identities.

Finally, are there any lessons learnt by India and Pakistan in this enduring rivalry? Russel Leng opines that even in those crises that ended in war, both countries showed remarkable restraint on the battlefield avoiding civilian targets and attacking cities. He also concludes that *the two sides have been learning, but they have been predisposed by their real politik beliefs to draw only certain types of lessons from their behaviour…(and this) real politik culture that pervades Indo-Pakistani relations constricts the range of actions available to their leaders, colors their historical memories, and narrows their collective identities.* This undoubtedly could have been an apt description until the 1990s. History in the subcontinent in the last two years would prove the willingness to explore new options, pursue a course that none even dared to dream of. The process did fail indicating the torturous path ahead, but there lies the silver lining : there is an effort to break the deadlock and the courage to even fail.

A daring effort to theorize an anarchic confrontation, this book would be an important addition to Indo-Pak literature. It is certainly is a laudable academic endeavour.■

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Clash of Arms

P.R. Chari

KARGIL: FROM SURPRISE TO VICTORY
By General V. P. Malik
HarperCollins Publishers, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 436, Rs. 595.00

The end of the Kargil conflict (May-July 1999) witnessed a burst of creative activity with scores of books being published on this clash of arms. It was also subjected to an official inquiry headed by K. Subrahmanyam, resulting in the Kargil Review Committee (KRC) Report, later published by Sage. Strangely, except for a semi-official account by Shireen Mazari and some short articles written by others, Pakistan has maintained an unusual silence on this conflict, although its interlocutors have not been remiss in vigorously defending their aggression which precipitated the Kargil conflict. It has also been the staple of numerous seminars in both India and Pakistan, but also in the United States.

There are several remarkable aspects of this conflict that have attracted attention from the strategic community. For one, it was fought at altitudes of around 3000 to 4000 metres above sea level. The troops involved needed to possess the skills of the mountaineer alongside fighting abilities; it thereby provided an object lesson in high altitude warfare. The Kargil conflict also highlighted India's time-honoured capacity to be surprised by its adversaries, as noted in its past intelligence failures—1962 (Sino-Indian border conflict), 1947 (raiders invading Kashmir), or 1965 (infiltration by Pakistani forces precipitating the Indo-Pak conflict that year), and several others. Preceding the Kargil conflict, the armed forces were surprised by the entry and occupation of several posts in the Kargil sector by alleged militants. Most importantly, the Kargil conflict disproved beliefs that the possession of nuclear weapons by two adversaries and establishing a state of nuclear deterrence between them will also deter conventional conflict. The Kargil conflict showed that low level, limited conflict was possible between nuclear adversaries without the nuclear threshold being breached.

General Malik's book discusses several of these issues. He was the Chief of the Army Staff at the time when India and Pakistan clashed in Kargil and can inform us with authority about the events that preceded and followed this conflict.

Did the Kargil conflict have nuclear overtones? More specifically, did the availability of nuclear weapons to both adversaries contain and inhibit the conflict? This issue has divided the strategic community in the United States from their counterparts in India and Pakistan. The Americans are convinced that nuclear weapons played an overwhelming role in moderating the Kargil conflict, containing it from expanding to other sectors in Kashmir, and preventing it from acquiring cross-border dimensions. Strategists in India and Pakistan, on the contrary, are at great pains to explain that nuclear weapons were irrelevant to the Kargil conflict. General Malik discounts the possibility of nuclear weapons having entered the Indian calculus during the Kargil conflict, though he does mention "intelligence reports about the Tilla ranges being readied for possible launching of missiles and repeated statements being made by their [Pakistani] political leaders and non-military senior officials "; hence it became prudent "to take some protective measures….our missile assets were dispersed and relocated."

The author dismisses the detailed account published by Bruce Riedel, Presidential aide who was present in the meeting, that President Clinton confronted Nawaz Sharif in Washington during the conflict with the accusation that Pakistan was readying its nuclear forces during the Kargil conflict, which led to Nawaz Sharif deciding to withdraw the Pakistani forces and ending the Kargil crisis. General Malik surmises this episode to

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be a case of "arm-twisting," but it "helped in claiming much greater success for President Clinton's personal intervention in the crisis than it deserved." The Americans have privately claimed that both Pakistan and India had activated their nuclear assets in unspecified ways and that the danger of an escalation of the Kargil conflict was a distinct possibility; hence the Presidential intervention defused this possibility. No definite conclusions can be drawn of these allegations and denials unless the official archives are opened for inspection, which is most unlikely. Consequently, the question whether nuclear weapons entered the picture during the Kargil episode seems destined to remain speculative, but inconclusive, like the identity of Jaswant Singh's mole!

Another controversial issue embedded in the Kargil conflict is the patent failure of intelligence to anticipate or detect the intruders from across the Line of Control till they were well entrenched. General Malik broadly supports the conclusions of the KRC Report that "the Pakistani armed intrusion in the Kargil sector came as a complete and total surprise to the Indian Government, Army and intelligence agencies..." Why? A technical argument is made by apologists that the Intelligence Bureau is responsible for internal and the Research and Analysis Wing for external intelligence; hence, their failure to collect and assess information on the cross-border preparations for the intrusions was responsible for the intelligence failure. There are two problems with this simple explanation. First, why did Army Intelligence not gather this information, since there was no prohibition on their acquiring cross-border intelligence for tactical purposes. Second, there is no plausible reason why several border posts in the Kargil sector were vacated in winter allowing them to be occupied by the intruders; or why foot patrols were not sent to check the gaps between border posts. Or why air patrols were not mounted if weather conditions did not permit ground reconnaissance. The author admits that none of this happened; most importantly, a conviction was obtaining "that the threat was limited to infiltration of jihadi militants along with heavy firing to interdict the (Srinagar-Leh) road." This was another classic case of the facts of intelligence and their assessment being dovetailed into an existing preconception that has been responsible for most intelligence failures in the world.

There is more in this book that is informative, but also what is controversial. In the former category is new information that China was not strictly neutral between India and Pakistan during the Kargil conflict. It had increased its patrolling activity along the Sino-Indian border opposite Ladakh requiring precautionary measures by India. It had also made up Pakistan's deficiencies in conventional arms at this critical time. Moreover, the frequent visits of Pakistan's military and political leaders to China during the conflict leave no doubt about the close consultations that were proceeding between the two countries. More controversially, the author mentions the subtle and unsubtle means used by the Indian leadership to draw the armed forces into their political and electoral machinations. Thus, an Army team of officers was invited to address a group of the ruling party MPs in Parliament House, which, not expectedly, led to a furore with the Opposition parties alleging bias. In essence, India's armed forces have remained apolitical, despite pressures upon them to serve partisan political interests, which can be traced back to the Emergency. It would become progressively more difficult for them to stay neutral considering the crumbling political party system and the bureaucratic machinery in the country.

General Malik's views on the feasibility of limited conventional conflict in a nuclear environment are well known. He is an adherent of this concept, which is certainly arguable, and has divided strategic opinion among scholars and practitioners across the world. This would not be the appropriate place to dilate on the pros and cons of this controversy. The author has extended his analysis to events immediately after the Kargil conflict, which includes the abortive Agra Summit; 9/11 and its reverberations through the world, including South Asia; the attack on Parliament in December 2001 and the year-long border confrontation crisis that ensued; the initiation of the Indo-Pak peace process; and the future of this relationship.

While dealing with these major issues the author has been candid and expressed his views clearly without hedging them with qualifications, as is usual in books written by academics. Given his background and unique knowledge of events as they unfolded during and after the Kargil conflict this is to be appreciated. This book is a welcome addition to the literature on the Indo-Pak conflict-ridden relationship; it is commended to those having a casual or professional interest in conflict studies. It would interest students of international relations and also modern history.■

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The Question of War and Peace

Bhupinder Brar

The objective of the book, stated on the very first page of the Introduction, is to analyse three key factors – influence of religion and religious extremism, role of Pakistan army as a political force, and the possession of nuclear weapons by India and Pakistan – *as they influence the threat of a nuclear conflict.*

PROSPECTS FOR PEACE IN SOUTH ASIA
Edited by Rafiq Dossani and Henry S. Rowen
Orient Longman, Hyderabad, 2006, pp. 424, Special Indian price Rs. 500.00

The title of the book under review is utterly misleading. It certainly misled me when I agreed to do the review. First of all, this is not a book about South Asia if we go by the widely accepted definition of the subcontinent. South Asia is supposed to have at least seven states: India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and Maldives. The slight disagreement is about the justification of including two other states – Afghanistan and Myanmar. As far as this book is concerned, South Asia is only India and Pakistan. None of the chapters deals directly with any other countries. In nearly three and a half hundred pages of the main text, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal come up only in the last three pages, that too as an 'Appendix'.

At one level, these exclusions may have something to do with the rather restricted and negative manner in which the term peace is employed in the book, essentially as absence of war between states. Internal conflicts are taken into account only to the extent that they affect the bahaviour of states vis-à-vis one another on questions of war and peace. That seems to be the reason why internal conflicts in Sri Lanka or Nepal are not discussed in any detail even though neither country has seen much peace in recent years.

However, the real reason for these glaring anomalies becomes clear the moment we begin to read the Introduction. This is not actually a book about South Asia as such, but rather about those parts of South Asia which cause the Americans major worries and concern, *at the moment.* The moment happens to the period between 1998, when India and Pakistan conducted nuclear tests, and 2002 when the two states engaged in a ten-month long eyeball to eyeball border deployment until India withdrew its forces. Kargil had happened in between, in 1999. Many among the American policy makers were convinced by the events of this period that India and Pakistan *could* go to a nuclear war. *Would* they in fact do so? What were the domestic and subcontinental factors which turned such a possibility into high probability? What could the Americans do to lower the rate of probability? What should they in fact do?

These could and must have been genuine concerns for the only super-power left in the world. Inputs from the American academia and private research institutions would naturally be welcome. That is presumably when the book was conceived, or perhaps the conference on which the volume is based. Twelve of the fifteen contributors are American. They make their analyses and they make their suggestions. As a typical South Asian academic concerned about peace in his region of the world, I would not be disinterested in knowing what the range of American academic perceptions on the question was. It would not bring down the value of volume for me if it were given a more honest title such as "Risk of Indo-Pak Nuclear Conflict: American Perceptions". Who is responsible for the misleading title: the editors, the original American publishers or the Indian publishers? Does it make a lot of sense to sell a few copies more this way?

Which brings me to the next point, which has implications beyond this volume. This is about bringing out Indian editions and reprints of books published in the West. As far as I can make out, this was meant to be a volume about what was seen as an essentially American concern, written by Americans for American readers. There may be a specialist audience, necessarily small in number, in other countries as well which wants to know what Americans think on various issues. Such niche audience often has the means to buy the original American edition. So what can an average South Asian reader expect to get from a reprint? Do American publishers bring out special American reprints of South Asian scholarship on America? Is this not another case of American/western hegemony in our academia? Why else should we routinely tend to lean on western scholarship rather on our own even when the subject happens to be our own countries? Those among us who are also teachers must realize the role we are thus playing in passing on the colonial mentality to successive generations.

My final general point about the book has to do not with the editors or the publishers but with the contributors. Having understood from the Introduction what the real concerns of the book are, I began to experience a rising level of annoyance with the way most contributors have approached their assignments. The objective of the book, stated on the very first page of the Introduction, is to analyse three key factors – influence of religion and religious extremism, role of Pakistan army as a political force, and the possession of nuclear weapons by India and Pakistan – *as they influence the threat of a nuclear conflict.* Many contributors however decide to take a long detour of the 'historical background', spending in the process much of their own energy and the reader's time. I do not know whether this happens because many contributors happen to be historians or because they happen to be simply too entrenched in their 'academic' moorings, for the tendency to begin with the beginning is common among non-historian academics as well. At any rate, in most cases the detour does not seem to make the analysis of the 'current scenario'—to which much greater space should have been devoted—any less tentative and speculative. That is because only a few contributors are able to discern long term patterns in history which are enduring enough to persist in the present and influence the future. In most cases, one gets lost in the chronological description of the vicissitude of circumstances. Given this, I wonder how much wiser the American policy makers would be in their decision-making after reading this book. These details may be informative for the fresh undergraduate students in the American university departments of South Asian Studies, but they are hardly news to any South Asian reader of the book.

To disaggregate the book into twelve essays, each discreet in its own orientation and purpose. Some are both insightful and persuasive. Charles Kennedy points out very interesting parallels in the ways in which successive military regimes in Pakistan have been able to neutralize civilian opposition, gain legitimacy, and establish themselves, so much so that purely civilian democracy seems to have no future in Pakistan. Peter R. Lavoy's essay, somewhat misleadingly called 'Pakistan's Nuclear Doctrine', is actually about something larger and more pervasive. It maps the various discourses – military, political, social and psychological – which are woven around nuclear weapons in that country. Rifaat Hussain, a Pakistani scholar, has written an essay on his country's relations with Azad Kashmir with such scholarly neutrality and candour that it should be exemplary for Indian and Pakistani scholars writing on Kashmir. Among the essays on India, Ainslie T. Embree's 'Who Speaks for India?' is full of deep insights about the nature of relationship between nationalism, state and civil society which produces ambivalences at all three levels. Shorn of the jargon Rajesh M. Basrur resorts to like all strategic theorists, I found his analysis of the border deployment of the Indian armed forces very cogently argued and a timely caution against its repetition in future.■

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The Conundrum of Pakistan

I.P. Khosla

DEMOCRATIZATION IN PAKISTAN: A STUDY OF THE 2002 ELECTIONS
By Mohammad Waseem
Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2006, pp.241, Rs. 495.00

PAKISTAN 2005
Edited by Charles Kennedy and Cynthia Botteron
Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2006, pp. 293, Rs.550.00

A HISTORY OF THE PAKISTAN ARMY: WARS AND INSURRECTIONS
By Brian Cloughley
Oxford University Press, Karachi, Third Edition, 2006, pp. 392, Rs.595.00

HISTORIC BATTLEFIELDS OF PAKISTAN
By Johnny Torrens-Spence
Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2006, pp. 140, Rs.495.00

COLONIAL REPORTS ON PAKISTAN'S FRONTIER AREAS
Edited and Introduced by Robert Nichols
Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2005, pp.95, Rs.199.00

One of the first things that comes to mind when one studies Pakistan is the question of military rule versus democracy, and there are three levels at which this comes to mind.

The first level is that of the impulse to assert, when military rule is proclaimed yet once more, that this is bad for freedom, bad for the people of Pakistan and for bilateral relations since it is difficult for democratic governments to deal comfortably with military dictators. Jawaharlal Nehru said it well in 1958 after the Ayub coup, that 'where power is concentrated in an individual, and that individual is a military person, the normal checks which occur in a government or in a society are absent ... inherent in such a system are always certain risks and dangers.' Since then, with variations, Indian spokesmen have been saying much the same thing.

At the second level there is the inclination to look for causes: there has been a general tendency to blame the politicians for taking the country down the wrong path, that it is on the verge of breakdown and that only the military could have saved it; but there has also been the urge to see conspiracies by the armed forces, and to suggest that because they did not want rapprochement with India or were afraid their privileges would be withdrawn, they plotted to ensure that a situation arose to make a military takeover seem natural. It is at the third level that the analysis gets more interesting. It has been over fifty years now that the Pakistan armed forces have been involved, either directly or indirectly, in the running of the country; they have taken steps, during those years, to ensure that military rule is not greeted with large scale objections from the people, whose general response has been, indeed, to greet it with some sense of relief; there is a need to analyse the ways in which the military has brought about socio-economic and political change to support their rule, Islamization being an obvious example.

Mohammad Waseem's study of the October 2002 national and provincial assembly elections looks at all three levels and is the kind of totally comprehensive and thorough study that one has come to expect from this Pakistani professor who has had an extensive academic experience. This volume draws on theory and the concepts of psephology and on extensive field research which was done by the author and his research associates. It concentrates on three kinds of development: the struggle to bring about accountability where the politicians had allowed corruption to reign virtually uncontrolled; the devolution of power to local bodies which every military government has taken forward and which effectively reduces the power of the central legislature; and, most important of all, the overall significance of the elections, since they were a stepping stone to civilian rule, but in a very specific way.

Accountability here could be the generic description for all the things that were done to ensure that the existing political parties were weakened. This included the effective ban on Nawaz Sharif, who had been exiled but whose nomination papers were filed and then withdrawn, and Benazir Bhutto whose nomination papers were rejected. This put the two main parties into difficulties which were compounded by a number of administrative and political measures which created intra-party turmoil; the date for the start of the election campaign was changed; their meetings were disrupted; a National Accountability Bureau was set up to frame corruption charges and it soon became clear that its target was the two main political parties' leaders.

As for devolution, this could be the generic description for all things that were done to prune the powers of the National Parliament. Just as Zia-ul-Haq had done before him, and Ayub Khan before that, Musharraf put into operation a local government plan, LGP 2000, to devolve power to the district and tehsil levels. By August 2001 local governments were installed by election in Pakistan's 96 districts, 307 tehsils, 30 town councils and 6022 union councils, and these elections were held on a non-party basis. This undercut, as it was intended to do, the powers of both the civil service and of the politicians, for now the locally elected leaders were directly looking to the centre.

The overall significance of the elections lies partly in the steps taken by Musharraf to consolidate his position before holding them. One of these was the referendum of April 2002, which endorsed his policies overwhelmingly. In Pakistan it is seen that Yahya Khan did not take the precaution of holding a referendum before the national elections and so, when the results were announced and it was not possible to form a government, there was a vacuum. It is part of the collective learning process for potential military leaders that this must never again be allowed to happen, and the way to ensure that it does not is to get legitimized by a referendum so that in case of a power vacuum you can fill it. Further a legal framework order was passed which legitimated all that has been done by him since the coup of October 1999.

Then the President retained the power to dissolve the National Assembly, which effectively increased his power at the expense of that of the Assembly. The more important significance lies in the way the discourse about politics has changed in Pakistan; not that this change was brought about by Musharaf alone. It has, on the contrary, been some twenty years in the making. The ethnic lines of cleavage have declined in significance, to be replaced by religion; Pakhtun society has moved towards political Islam and away from ethnicity. This is in line with a broad trend that directs politics away from issues such as, in this case, more autonomy for the Pakhtuns, and towards questions of identity, with obvious implications for India, and, of course, for the links that Pakistan has with terrorism. A requirement for minimum educational qualifications for all candidates also changed the foundation: the traditional elements that had supported the two major parties were most affected, since many of their candidates could not comply with this requirement, but the Islamists benefited as the education given by madrasas had been recognized years earlier and almost all their candidates were able to qualify.

The volume also includes detailed sections on the election machinery, the conduct of the election campaign, and the results including an analysis. Altogether one can find here all that one could wish for about this election, and much about Pakistani politics besides.

Pakistan 2005 is the fifth volume in the Pakistan briefing series which was started in 1992; the fourth was published in 2000, so this one covers events since then, including the impact of 9/11. This is a fairly comprehensive coverage by a group of well qualified authors of politics and economics, India-Pakistan relations and the moves to democracy and the way Islam affects all this. Chapter 1 describes the political issues in 2004, including the efforts of Musharraf to overcome the hurdles that the politicians tried to place in his way; the Abdul Qadeer Khan affair, described as a ticking time bomb; and Pakistan's efforts to control terrorism, concluding that the US-Pakistan entente on anti-terrorism is not likely to survive the decade.

Chapter 2 on the economy outlines the way GDP growth shows healthy trends, pressure on the foreign exchange account has eased and tax reforms have yielded results. But poverty has increased, as has inequality and unemployment. For sustained growth it is necessary that the two sides be reconciled. About foreign aid chapter 3 shows that the donors are interested only in promoting their strategic interests, not development, so they are happy that substantive political and administrative powers have been transferred to the local bodies under the LGP 2000 plan, which is taken by them as progress in democracy, while increasing the powers of the National Assembly does not seem to be on their list of priorities.

The next two chapters are on India-Pakistan relations. US pressure on Pakistan has increased following 9/11; the US has been engaged in a delicate balancing act on the subcontinent, sometimes tilting towards Pakistan, at other times, as during the Clinton administration, to India, but now there is progress in relations with both countries. However it is not entirely trouble free and Washington has been especially reluctant to assume any kind of role in subcontinental conflict solving.

Chapter 6 is a user's guide to democracy, with a step wise explanation of how to go about consolidating power in Pakistan after a coup; the steps taken by Musharraf have been 'eerily familiar' to those taken by his predecessors Iskandar Mirza, Ayub Khan, and Zia-ul-Haq; Yahya Khan, as we saw above, is not a good example to follow. The critical steps are to get everything you do legalized and approved by the highest court, get to be President, rewrite the constitution, then hold local elections, eliminate the major or most troublesome political parties by whatever means possible and then hold national elections. The last three chapters cover some of the microtuning of all this, including the introduction of educational qualifications for elections, the devolution of power to local bodies and the flourishing of the madrasas, due to the decline of other educational institutions.

Cloughley's is a straightforward soldier's account of the Pakistan army. He himself was a soldier all his life, including Defence Attache in Islamabad and Deputy Head of the UN Mission in Jammu and Kashmir, and he does not pretend that this is a scholarly account. So you will not find here a Stephen Cohen who in his book on the subject was able to analyse different theories of military intervention or the role of the armed forces in society or that of Islam in the armed forces; or even a Hasan Askari Rizvi who describes how politics and the military interact. Here you will find comments like, judging what an Indian foreign minister said on one occasion 'this was bumbling stuff'; or that it was 'bizarre' that two members of the commonwealth should, during the Kargil operations, be shelling each other; or, of course, and above all, that all four seizures of power by the army were without bloodshed and attracted almost total support from a long suffering citizenry. In an earlier edition (1999) he had added that the army can be relied upon to be the guardian of freedom, but this laudable soldierly sentiment is left out of this one. He had also said in the earlier one that Zia-ul-Haq left the country in better shape than he found it, but the prominent British scholar and Pakistanphile Ian Talbot told him this was 'rubbish' so he left that out, too. But the general sentiment remains; the politicians of Pakistan are described with well chosen adjectives: ludicrous; devious; political rule was a 'squalid soap opera'; erratic, this of Nawaz Sharif, to the point of endangering the country as a whole, and so on. On the other hand the army has a job to do, which includes running the country and it goes ahead and gets on with it.

Cloughley tries to be objective about the Kargil operations of 1999, describing the incursions from Pakistan as illegal, but hints that Nawaz Sharif must have done it or at least been aware of it and, if he didn't like it, he should have had it stopped.

There is a new final chapter which includes the coup of 1999, from which 'the country benefited as a whole'; the operations in Waziristan where, expectedly, Kipling is quoted; US weapons supply and the opaque defence budget; peacekeeping by the Pakistan armed forces and, at the end, something about human rights violations and corruption by the armed forces, the 'virus attacking the army', which can be cured by a stiff dose of democracy.

Torrens-Spence's volume is a tourist guide to eighteen battlefield sites in Pakistan. There is a detailed sketch map attached with each site, as is a note on how best to get there. Then there is a competent description of the battle itself such that you can follow it on the sketch and, undoubtedly, if you are so inclined, while visiting the site. Evidently a great deal of research has gone into this for those who try to reconstruct battles know that the sources are few and unclear, while the sites can seldom be accurately located. This is acknowledged, and the author says, whenever he is uncertain, such as in the two battles of Alexander, that is there is some doubt about the exact location. Fortunately the British sources are not so difficult to get and most of the book therefore turns into a collection of pieces about the triumph of British arms in the areas which are now Pakistan.

Nichols's little booklet is a reprinting of two colonial reports on the frontier, specifically the FATA territories which have seen so much trouble for the Pakistani authorities. They are now reprinted precisely because of that, since at that time there was a powerful government able to accumulate systematic knowledge about the populations there. The unwritten assumption is that the British way of dealing with the problem was successful, which many would question. 'Wazirs must kill somebody, just as Englishmen must play games', is the typical sentiment expressed. Those interested in gaining some insight into the continuing conflict in that region would be interested in these reports. This assumes, of course, that the region has remained at a standstill for over a century; which could, on the one hand, be possible and, on the other hand, explain why there has been no progress in solving these problems. There is certainly a general presumption among both Americans and Pakistanis that the way to deal with the tribes is to follow the example of the British and there is a legitimate question as to whether that example showed any success at all, or whether this is, even if it did, really the best way in the 21st century.■

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Responses And Strategies

B. Raman

UNDERSTANDING TERRORISM IN SOUTH ASIA: BEYOND STATIST DISCOURSES
Edited by Imtiaz Ahmad
Manohar, Delhi, 2006, pp. 418, Rs. 900.00

RESPONDING TO TERRORISM IN SOUTH ASIA
Edited by S.D. Muni
Manohar, Delhi, 2006, pp. 542, Rs. 1095.00

In an exquisite paragraph, Saigol points out that the war against terrorism in Pakistan has partly to be a war waged by the state against itself because many of the terrorist organizations were initially sponsored by the state itself to serve its internal and external objectives.

Under a Ford Foundation grant, the Regional Centre of Strategic Studies of Colombo has brought out a two-volume study on *Terrorism in South Asia* consisting of papers contributed by eminent scholars from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal.

Professor S.D.Muni, formerly of the Jawaharlal Nehru University, who is now associated with the Observer Research Foundation (ORF) of New Delhi has been the over-all coordinator of the study as well as the editor of the second volume. The first volume has been edited by Imtiaz Ahmed, Professor of International Relations, University of Dhaka, and Executive Director of the Centre For Alternatives.

In his Preface to the second volume, Muni explains the scope of the study as follows: "The study is divided into two sections. In the first section, the way in which each of the South Asian States has responded to terrorism has been studied carefully. In the second section, some of the comparative aspects of the regional perspective such as the role of civil societies, consequences of the strategies pursued, role of the third parties, and political economy of terrorism and responding strategies have been taken up for discussion and analysis."

The Overview contributed by Muni on the basis of the conclusions emerging from all the papers provides a lucidly-expressed holistic perspective to the problem of terrorism of different hues and mutations confronting South Asia. It tries to rise above being merely a scholar's ex-parte judgement on those responsible for dealing with terrorism.

In addition to Muni's Overview, two other papers stand out by their sheer excellence. The first is the one titled 'The State and the Limits of Counter-Terrorism—the Experience of Pakistan and Sri Lanka' in the first volume written by Rubina Saigol, Country Director, Action Aid, Pakistan.

The second is the one titled 'Responding to Terrorism—the Pakistani Response' in the second volume by Samina Ahmed, Senior Researcher, International Crisis Group (ICG). Both of them, despite being based in Pakistan, have shown tremendous moral courage and intellectual honesty in analysing the origin and consequences of terrorism in Pakistani territory, its impact on Pakistan's own stability and on its relations with the other countries of the region.

In an exquisite paragraph, Saigol points out that the war against terrorism in Pakistan has partly to be a war waged by the state against itself because many of the terrorist organizations were initially sponsored by the state itself to serve its internal and external objectives.

In a devastating comment on the role of the leaders of the jihadi organizations, who send their followers on suicide missions, while themselves enjoying a luxurious life with the funds collected under the pretext of jihad, she says: "Jehad, like all other wars, is a classed phenomenon in which the foot soldiers are exploited while the leaders make profits."

Some interesting statistics are to be found in her paper: About 8,000 Pakistani Punjabis, about 3,000 from the North-West Frontier Province and about 500 from Sindh are estimated to have died in the jihad in Jammu and Kashmir. As against this, only 112 Balochs have died in jihad, mostly in Afghanistan. The Balochs have not contributed substantially to the jihad—whether in Afghanistan or in India.

Samina Ahmed says: " Despite the evident threat posed by religious and sectarian extremism, the military is reluctant to part ways with its Islamic extremist allies, who have, in the perceptions of Pakistan's authoritative decision-makers, played a valuable role in the past in the domestic and external context, and who continue to play a useful role in advancing the military's regional agendas and in helping the military retain the control over the State."

Commenting on the post-9/11 policies of the West, she says: " Even as the US and its Western allies focus their attention on the elimination of regional terrorism in Pakistan and its neighbourhood, they have yet to understand that their support for Pakistan's military-dictated political status quo will undermine their attempts to curb and eliminate terrorist-related activities within and from Pakistani territory."

In an interesting paper in the first volume, Shahedul Anam Khan, a retired officer of the Bangladesh Army and presently, editor of the journal *Defence and Strategic Affairs*, compares the counter-terrorism methods and experiences of India and Bangladesh and says: "India and Bangladesh provide two very different canvasses of the terrorism phenomenon, although the root causes and the methods used by them are very similar, so are the impediments that these two countries are facing. Many of the limits are inbuilt in the system and in the attitude of the politicians and bureaucrats. While external factors exacerbate terrorism, taking refuge in this may not help us to totally eliminate the phenomenon."

In a paper on Bangladesh in the second volume, Abul Kalam, Professor of International Relations at the Dhaka University, correctly points out as follows: "The country's lingering confrontational politics, providing a climate favourable for the terrorists to operate has to end…..To curb terrorism, a spirit of communication and mutual exchange between the Government and the opposition has to replace the current violence-prone culture of hartal and boycott, with a mutual recognition of shared needs." He also refers to the continuing perceptual divide between India and Bangladesh on the question of cross-border terrorism allegedly emanating from the Bangladesh territory, which is coming in the way of counter-terrorism cooperation between the two countries.

There are three comprehensive papers on Sri Lanka and two on Nepal. The papers on Sri Lanka have been contributed by Jehan Perera, Director, Media and Research at the National Peace Council of Sri Lanka, and Ketheshwaran Loganathan, of the Centre For Policy Alternatives, Colombo. Saigol's paper partly touches upon Sri Lanka also.

The papers on Nepal have been contributed by Dhruba Kumar, Professor of Political Science, Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, and Deepak Thapa, a senior journalist of Nepal.

Unfortunately, these papers have been overtaken by events in the two countries since the beginning of this year. They do provide a detailed account of how the problem of terrorism was sought to be addressed in the past, but having apparently been written before the recent events, do not touch upon the two burning questions of the day: How to end the renewed bloodshed

...instead of trying to define terrorism, the international community should prepare a short list of acts of terrorism such as hijacking of planes, use of improvised explosive devices against means of public transport and other soft targets and declare all organizations indulging in such actions as terrorist organizations.

in Sri Lanka? Are the Maoists' conversion to democracy in Nepal genuine?

Apart from Muni, the other Indian contributors are Ranabir Samaddar, Director, Calcutta Research Group, on 'Colonial State, Terror and Law', Ajai Sahni, Executive Director, Institute For Conflict Management, New Delhi, on 'Responding To Terrorism in Punjab and Jammu & Kashmir', Vijendra Singh Jaffa, a retired officer of the Indian Administrative Service, who had served in the North-East, on 'Insurgencies in North-East India', Wasbir Hussain, Consulting Editor, *The Sentinel*, Guwahati, on 'Bhutan's Response to the Challenge of Terrorism', Lt.Gen. (retd) V.R. Raghavan, former Director-General of Military Operations and, currently, Director, Delhi Policy Group, on the 'Role of Third Parties in Resolving Terrorism-generating Conflicts', Mahendra P. Lama, Professor of South Asian Studies at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, on the 'Political Economy of Terrorism', Sanjoy Hazarika, journalist, on 'India and the Sub-Nationalist Movements in Mizoram and Nagaland', and P.V. Ramana, Research Fellow, Observer Research Foundation (ORF), New Delhi, on 'Data Paper on Terrorism in South Asia'.

Mizoram is a success story in the history of India's Counter-insurgency Operations. So is Punjab in the history of India's Counter-Terrorism Operations. The credit for the restoration of normalcy in Mizoram and for finding a political solution to the problem there should go to the Army and the political leadership, particularly to Mrs. Indira Gandhi, as well as to the farsightedness and amenability to compromise exhibited by the late Laldenga, the head of the Mizo National Front (MNF). Laldenga's disenchantment with Pakistan and its Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), which had tried to keep the Mizo insurgency alive, was the trigger which led to the peace process.

Punjab is a remarkable example of success in counter-terrorism operations without conceding the demands of the terrorists. Among the factors, which contributed to this success, were the legendary leadership of Shri K.P.S. Gill, who was the Director-General of Police of Punjab and who showed that a well-motivated, well-trained and well-led police is the best counter to terrorism, the political backing he received from the Governments of India and Punjab, the role of the army in assisting the police when needed, and the tremendous flow of precise intelligence from many western intelligence agencies after the blowing-up of the Kanishka aircraft of Air India off the Irish Coast in June 1985 by the Khalistani terrorists in which a large number of foreigners, mainly Canadians, were killed.

Among other factors, which contributed to the success of the police, one could mention the fact that while Pakistan's ISI provided the Khalistani terrorists with training, arms and ammunition and sanctuaries, it did not send foreign mercenaries into Punjab to help them.

Sahni has very comprehensively analysed the role played by the police under Gill's leadership. At the same time, one cannot help having a feeling that he has not done enough justice to the contributions made by other officers in dealing with the Khalistani terrorism at the initial stages, when hardly any worthwhile intelligence was coming.

The difficulties which we continue to face in J&K could be attributed to the large-scale involvement of Pakistanis and other foreign nationals in acts of terrorism and the ambivalent attitude of the western countries, which look upon J&K as a disputed territory and hence are disinclined to extend the same kind of intelligence cooperation as they did in Punjab.

The two volumes are not without deficiencies. They are rich in information, but weak in insights. This could be attributed to the fact that of the 22 contributors, only four—two each from India and Bangladesh— had served in the Government and had exercised responsibilities relating to counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism. The rest are academics, journalists and other intellectuals.

Practically all the contributors have highlighted the failure of the international community to agree on a universally acceptable definition of terrorism, but have not been able to come out with suggestions as to how to get out of this difficulty. I have myself been suggesting for some years that instead of trying to define terrorism, the international community should prepare a short list of acts of terrorism such as hijacking of planes, use of improvised explosive devices against means of public transport and other soft targets and declare all organizations indulging in such actions as terrorist organizations.

State terrorism and state-sponsored terrorism are used by many of the contributors as synonymous. They are not so. State terrorism is the use of terror by a state to suppress its own citizens. State-sponsored terrorism is the use of terrorism by a state against another state for achieving a national objective.

The difficulties posed by the emergence of suicide terrorism as a strategic weapon in Sri Lanka and in Pakistan and India, the gravitation of the terrorists from the use of hand-held weapons to that of improvised explosive devices and from attacks on hard targets to soft targets, the increasing use of science and technology by the terrorists and the role of the Internet in terrorism and counter-terrorism have not received much attention. These do have an impact on the way a State responds to terrorism.

Since 1998, the conventional wisdom on terrorism has undergone many changes. Economic deprivation, social backwardness, lack of education, bad governance are no longer the only motivating factors. Many of the post-1998 terrorists are well-educated and come from well-to-do families. Their unhappiness with certain aspects of foreign policies—more than any unhappiness with domestic policies— is becoming an important motivating factor. These changes in conventional wisdom are not adequately reflected.

Professor Muni's conclusion that "in responding to the challenge of terrorism, the South Asian States have shown a strong inclination towards the use of force, though this use of force is generally mingled with the feeble use of other strategies as political and constitutional accommodation and the developmental approach" is debatable and does not reflect the Indian reality.

There have been very few instances in India (for example in the Golden Temple in Amritsar)where the State has taken the initiative in using force. The use of force has generally been as an act of self-defence. The basic principle of Indian counterterrorism is to repeatedly deny success on the ground to terrorists through physical security, disruption of terrorist cells, investigation and prosecution. This is also known as the doctrine of passive defence as against the doctrine of active defence followed by the US and Israel.

Despite these gaps and deficiencies, the two volumes are a commendable effort towards a holistic study of the phenomenon of terrorism in South Asia and would be valuable additions to the libraries of academic institutions and the training institutions of the police and other security forces and agencies in South Asia as well as in the countries of other regions.■

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Identity Politics

Deb Mukharji

THE EMERGENCE OF BANGLADESH: VOL 2: RISE OF BENGALI NATIONALISM (1958-1971)
By Badruddin Umar
Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2006, pp. 371, Rs 595.00

Badruddin Umar is one of Bangladesh's best known intellectuals. As a commentator and author on the internal social and economic dynamics of Bangladesh, his views have been ideologically consistent over several decades and commanded attention even from those who may disagree with him. His work on the language movement in East Pakistan has received critical acclaim.

The present volume covers the crucial period from 1958, when Pakistan came under the military rule of Ayub Khan to the emergence of Bangladesh in December 1971. Umar goes over the economic policies of the Ayub administration and their effects on the people of both wings, the political developments leading to the fall of Ayub, the manipulations of Bhutto with a compliant Yahya leading to the army crackdown in East Pakistan and the subsequent Indian intervention and the emergence of Bangladesh.

Writing about Ayub's land reforms, Umar details how the basic objective was not the welfare of the relatively disadvantaged sections of society but the creation of support for Ayub's concept of Basic Democracy by creating new classes in favour of the military regime. In West Pakistan the effort was for cutting down to size the powerful landlords and establishing the primacy of the new business barons colluding with the military and the bureaucracy. The objective situation in East Pakistan was different as the Permanent Settlement had been already undone and the zamindars, mostly Hindus, were no longer a factor. Ayub's policies helped sustain petty landlords and money lenders to the detriment of the peasant. Similarly, the labour and industrial policies were directed against the interests of the industrial worker. Umar goes on to detail the stirrings of industrial unrest and student movements and points out, "There was very little organized trade union work of the Awami League and other parties. Most of the important trade unions were dominated by the Communist party through organizations and persons associated with them".

As is known, East Pakistan had left undefended during the 1965 Indo-Pak war which did not go unnoticed. Umar comments that the war was a calculated attempt to "divert the attention of the people away from their domestic problems and struggles and arouse a kind of 'nationalist' frenzy". Umar concludes that Sheikh Mujibur Rehman realized the distress of East Pakistanis at the neglect of security during the war. This, together with increasing economic disparity between the two wings of Pakistan strengthened the Awami League's demand for regional autonomy, as was to be shortly formulated in the 6-point programme.

The 6-point programme of the Awami League is historically the beginning of the end of Pakistan as it essentially asserted that the eastern wing should get its rightful dues, a demand that Islamabad was unlikely to seriously and sincerely consider or concede. It is not surprising that in keeping with his ideological convictions, Umar contemptuously rubbishes the 6-points as it "contained practically nothing that concerned the working people-the peasants, the workers" etc. One may wonder if, in the name of the common people, he is not, in deference to ideological purity, distancing himself from the will of the people itself.

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Subsequent chapters travel the well known events of the late sixties in Pakistan: the Agartala conspiracy case against Mujib which never had any substance, the fall of Ayub Khan (though this had more to do with the upsurge in West Pakistan than in the East), Yahya Khan's elections which were fair but whose results were too unappetizing to be acceptable in the west. Umar documents the consistently duplicitous role of Bhutto and the vacillations of an ineffective Yahya before the army crackdown. And one must wonder what turn the events may have taken if Mujib had not been so committed to constitutional means till the end.

It is a measure of Badruddin Umar's honesty that he acknowledges in the Preface that his opinion of many of the protagonists in the book is low, but tried, he says, to be objective. His own academic/intellectual orientation, while possibly permitting occasional insights, does not always reflect the mood of the very masses for whom he would like to speak, and who fought valiantly against the Pakistani army—even if it was in the framework of bourgeois politics, as Umar would see it. Maulana Bhashani was a towering personality of the times, but his role is less than adequately dealt with. While the book may claim to stand on its own, it deals only perfunctorily with the rise of Bengali nationalism—the title of the book. Bengali nationalism must by definition relate to linguistic/cultural identity. This is a subject with which Umar is well acquainted, but the great deal of space devoted to peasants, workers and left-wing movements (undoubtedly meriting attention in their own right) has left little space for Bengali nationalism. As a result, the book is more about East Pakistani separatism than the emergence of Bengali nationalism. Prejudice does, of course, seriously affect his dealing with Sheikh Mujibur Rehman. Without entering into any value judgements, the fact is that for a period very large sections of people in East Pakistan followed him implicitly. Umar does not quite explain how a man of such limited qualities, as he believes Mujib to have been, found such spontaneous support. The involvement of India in the emergence of Bangladesh is a fact of history, as indeed are attempts to implicate India in developments in East Pakistan by the Pakistan establishment in the 60s. It is therefore surprising that references to American thinking on East Pakistan at different stages find so much prominence. Wider references to how different segments in India looked on East Pakistan would have been useful.

The Emergence of Bangladesh is a useful addition to the literature of a fraught period which saw the failure of a South Asian state. Even if some of the judgements may be in question, many facts which have been brought out would be of lasting interest.■

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Complex Realities

Amit Baruah

TERRORISM IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR SOUTH ASIA
Edited by Wilson John, Swati Parashar
Pearson Longman, Delhi, 2005, pp.253, price not mentioned.

Terrorism has not just gripped the globe – discussion on this seemingly all-encompassing phenomenon tends to dominate not just the print media and television – but the world of books. If you pick up a western or Indian newspaper these days, it's quite possible that three out of five reports are related to terrorism. There's a huge amount of information pouring into households on the menace, but how much of it is authentic and based on fact?

Most writing on the phenomenon is dominated by retired spooks, who would have otherwise led reasonable boring, superannuated lives. Whether it is a police investigation or an editorial page article, there's a need to demand more "facts" in the writing on terrorism.

Turning to the book under discussion, a collection of papers for a seminar organized by the Observer Research Foundation, one can see the collection has some authentic insights into the operation of some new terrorist outfits in Southeast Asia.

At a conceptual level, Surat Horachaikul highlights the dangers of explaining away complex issues by simply labelling them as terrorist-related."Far worse than anything else, September 11 has begun simplistically converting many countries' historically complicated problems, which are ethnic, political, or socio-economic in nature and often resulting in groups demanding separatism into acts of terrorism, especially if the groups involved in the conflicts or those pursuing acts of separatism are people who believe in Islam," Surat writes.

Whether it is the separatist, nationalist strands in the southern Philippines or in Thailand, all these groups now tend to be coloured by the broad brush of terrorism. In my view, by simplifying everything into terrorism, we have complicated the search for solutions. In actual fact, the law-and-order approach to complex issues simply doesn't work. Political accommodation – or facilitating the entry of these groups into democratic politics – remains the only sure method of ensuring peace and stability in any part of the world.

Bilveer Singh in his paper on the Jemaah Islamiyah correctly points to the links with Afghanistan – the fact that many JI activists were veterans of the Afghan war – who then turned their attention to "nationalist" causes after the end of the CIA-sponsored, Pakistan-run "jehad" against the Soviet Union in 1989.One can, however, join issue with Singh's contention that Southeast Asia is "particularly prone" to Islamic-oriented terrorism for a number of reasons, including his statement of fact that there is a sizable presence of Muslims in the region. That is like saying that there will be a group like the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) just because there are large minorities of Tamils in different parts of the world.

There is an inherent danger in approaching the issue of terrorism from the point of view of community or religion – in the present case by Muslims or Islam. In fact, the Al-Qaeda and other associated groups want this kind of response so that their claims to representing an internationalist, political Islam are strengthened.

According to Jose T. Almonte, terrorism cannot be erased, but could be made irrelevant. "The global community's campaign against terrorism is liable to be a war without end. Instead of being swift and surgical, it is liable to be protracted, brutal and complex," he writes.

In Almonte's view, Islamism is a rebellion of the excluded – a rebellion that feeds on the unfulfilled longings and desires of impoverished peoples

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living on the margins of an unattainable consumerist world. "These frustrations can be eased by creating a more just world," he adds. V. Suryanarayan rightly points out that the Bali bombings of October 12, 2002, changed the perception of the Southeast Asian region for the rest of the world. Westerners were the obvious targets. Presenting the big picture, Suryanarayan argues that interstate boundaries in Southeast Asia were "imperialist creations" and tended to follow a colonially inspired pattern of demarcation for reasons of administrative convenience.

"Instead of uniting people who belong to the same ethnic group, speak the same language and follow the same religion, these boundaries have tended to divide them," he says.

At the end of his essay, Suryanarayan quotes Bambang Harymurti, editor of the respected *Tempo* magazine approvingly, "If Indonesia is to grow into a more mature and modern nation, it must successfully come to grips with the four key issues – the politics of Islam, the political role of the military, ethnic Chinese domination of the economy and tensions between the centre and the periphery ...".

According to Harymurti, if Indonesia succeeds in meeting these challenges, then it would become the world's third largest democracy and the largest democracy in the "Muslim" world. If it fails, then there is a real danger of the country splintering into small units.

There's little doubt that Indonesia, the largest and most important nation in Southeast Asia, holds the key to peace and progress in that part of the world. With an estimated population of 245 million, Indonesia is central to Southeast Asian politics. While security agencies must do everything in their power to nab individuals and neuter terrorist groups, the fact is that larger political and societal trends will dictate the direction that Indonesia will take.

Indonesia, much like India, is a multi-religious nation, which has strong traditions of tolerance and integration. Still coming out of the shackles of the Suharto era, Indonesia remains a beacon of hope for secular values; care must be taken to nurture and propagate these values.To make terrorism "irrelevant", as Almonte suggests, the world will have to do much more to win the battle of ideas in an increasingly paranoid world, where being Muslim makes you a terrorist suspect.

In the current "war on terrorism", Iraq provides a daily, ghastly example of how the largest superpower in the world is producing suicide bombers on a magnitude never before witnessed in the modern world.

Modern publicity techniques have ensured that Iraq is off the front pages, but along with the Palestinian question, remains the most potent weapon of Islamist terrorists who point to the lack of justice for the Palestinians and the brazen, one-sided support extended by the United States to Israel. I believe that justice for the Palestinians will remove the most potent Islamist cause that political Islam possesses. The creation of a "real" Palestinian State will do more for peace in the world than all the spending and mayhem in the name of the war on terror.■

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Transformation, Turbulence and Nostalgia

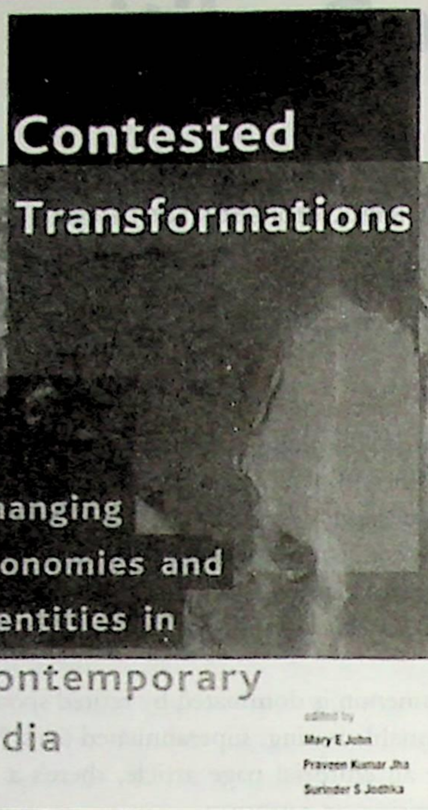
Amiya Kumar Bagchi

CONTESTED TRANSFORMATIONS: CHANGING ECONOMIES AND IDENTITIES IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA
Edited by Mary E. John, Praveen Kumar Jha, and Surinder S. Jodhka
Tulika Books, Delhi, 2006, pp. xxii+344, Rs.625.00

India is a very large country and has been home to perhaps a seventh of the human population for the last five hundred years, with some fluctuations around that proportion. It has hosted a greater diversity of documented or undocumented faiths, with their own peculiarities, for a longer time than any other country. India also has been home to one of the persistent, most variegated caste systems, which has changed like a chameleon as epochal changes have taken place, reappearing in a new colouring rather than taking on one uniform hue.

These are well-known facts but old theorizing about those facts continues to blunt the edge of analysis by social scientists even as they grapple with new issues and seek to construct conceptual structures to understand those issues. Most of the issues the authors of this volume grapple with is about the struggle of an ever larger work force to find remunerative employment and a slightly better life for their children than they have been used to. In a world governed by an ungoverned globalization of the rich the contours of which have been delineated by Prabhat and Utsa Patnaik with their usual dispassionate passion, agriculture is ceasing to provide even a subsistence for most people whose main income is derived from it. If they can find a non-agricultural employment in their own region, well and good. Otherwise, they migrate permanently or seasonally. The migration can be to cities or it can take the form of circular migration: whole villages or rather their adult members migrate as construction workers from West Bengal to Kerala, or as seasonal farm workers from Bihar to Punjab and Haryana. There are whole communities with their families, which are bonded to work in brick kilns or in the sugar cane fields, and their origins are often difficult to trace. Migration and industrial change produce new slums, tensions between the recent immigrants and older immigrants into the cities, and even seasoned researchers tend to forget that all cities are built of immigrants, some recent and some going back to the colonial times (especially true of the three Presidency cities, Bombay, Calcutta and Madras or Bangalore).

The overarching framework for analysing the nature of what has been dubbed as Globalization II, to distinguish the current phase of globalization by the rich for the rich, with finance at the helm, from an earlier phase of globalization with similar characteristics (1871-1914) is provided by the papers by Prabhat Patnaik and Aijaz Ahmad. The latter makes two important points. First, the economic globalization is accompanied by military, political and ideological campaigns. Secondly, the turn to right-wing politics—Hindutva-peddlers in India, Islamic fundamentalists in the Arab world, Evangelical Christians and neoconservatives in the USA, and the fundamentalist right-wing Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI in the Vatican, and Thatcherites (and Blairites) in the UK—is a global phenomenon. My question about the first proposition would be, 'When was capitalism anything otherwise than the pushing for profit with the help of arms?' Armed assault was the chief instrument for colonial conquests from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries, and imperialists used naked force in the campaigns to conquer all of Africa and totally subjugate China in the nineteenth century and in the wars waged in the 1990s from Somalia to Iraq, Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Lebanon up to the present time. Ahmad also points out that unlike in the phase of Globalization I, there is no overt inter-imperialist conflict in the current phase but I am more optimistic than he is regarding the strength of the resistance that is being mounted



from Nepal to Palestine, Lebanon, Cuba, Venezuela, Bolivia, Argentina and Uruguay against the naked murderousness of the Bush-Blair axis. May I also add that although I deplore, as he does, the decline of secularist values among the Indian elite, I think that he underemphasizes the failure of Nehru to either prepare the ground for implanting firmly secular values in his own bailiwick or take steps to correct the public demonstration of casteist practices among his fellow Congressmen. Nehru took no steps to carry out the land reforms recommended by the Kumarappa Committee, and leaders like Kamalapati Tripathi, who expected everybody to greet him with a *pranam* increased their power under his eye. His grand designs were already compromised when he did nothing to control foreign capital and they began to unravel from 1958 when India became dependent on foreign aid to balance its budget and by 1964-65 they were in tatters. The famine-like situation in 1966-67 put paid to whatever was left of Nehru's attempt to construct state capitalism without disciplining the capitalists or get rid of the landlords wielding private power over a semi-servile peasantry in the heartland of Congress rule.

Urban spaces in India, as in all cities under the sway of capital, are shaped by immigration and migration, by growing and declining industries, by competition for living room among the poor and for spacious or gracious living among the rich. A nostalgic vision of a bourgeois city that never was only clouds the analysis of social scientists. Partha Chatterjee in his paper asks, 'Are Indian cities becoming bourgeois at last? Or, if you prefer, we could exclaim: Are Indian cities becoming bourgeois, alas?' The sentiment expressed by either the joyful or the elegiac mode of this question betrays a nostalgia for a city that never was and a false memory of a 'bourgeois' city based on a reified notion of modernity that is the stock in trade of post-modernist writers. Which metropolis under capitalism ever achieved the Elysian state of bourgeois modernity? London? Remember Henry Mayhew's London; nearer our own time, remember the East End and the poor Jewish settlements, the Notting Hill riots, the recurring troubles in the new East End with its large Bangladeshi settlements, the South Asian ghetto of Southall, and the Blairite search for a security guaranteed by common people losing their basic civil rights. New York? Just think of the West Side of the city or Harlem. Even Social Democratic, wealthy Stockholm, reportedly one of the earliest planned cities in the world, in the 1960s was divided between the houses of the rich and the squalid living quarters of a shifting population scrounging a precarious livelihood, as you realize by reading the detective novels written by the couple Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö such as *The Laughing Policeman* or *The Man on the Balcony*.

Every capitalist city needs and spawns workers' settlements or slums, and structural change under capitalism converts yesterday's blue-collar workers into today's unemployed or underemployed proletariat, some of them bordering on paupers. And capitalism fragments even as it subjects workers to these shattering changes. In the Indian case, the fragmenting often takes place on lines of community or caste but cities in affluent capitalist countries also have localities based on ethnicity and religion. Just remember the riots of the young people of North African origin in the Paris suburbs. Chatterjee's notion that Calcutta was dominated by the Bengalis in an economic sense until recent decades is also false. Bengalis had ceased

to be the economically dominant community by the middle of the nineteenth century and much more decisively, after World War I. Traders and financiers from North India had assumed that position.

The postmodernist writers seek to convey a notion of the grandness of their narrative by using phrases that they do not define. Chatterjee wants us to consider 'the place of the city in the modern Indian imagination' (p. 119). The imagination of which Indian? Jagmohan or Sanjay Gandhi, or the authorities responsible for inviting Le Corbusier to plan the city of Chandigarh? Or the planners in charge of the Calcutta Improvement Trust in the 1950s?

It is a relief to turn from such unspecific, empirically false memories of a city that never was and never could be, under the rules of capitalist competition, to the empirically grounded narratives of Janaki Nair on Bangalore, and Sharit Bhowmick on Bombay-Mumbai. Nair recognizes that with the increasing prosperity of that part of Bangalore that caters to the needs of the IT industry, there are other parts which face severe constraints of basic civic facilities. But that deprivation has generated a new energy and organization among the Bangalore residents and is generating what she styles as 'municipal activism'. Bhowmick's paper traces the struggle for mill land, and slum land between workers who have lost everything except their living space to which they generally have no legal title and the real estate promoters, the elite and the ruling politicians who want to make both political and financial hay as the closure of textile mills seems to have made mill land ripe targets for wealthy housing and the workers a nuisance. The closure of the Bombay mills since the collapse of the great textile strike has made 220,000 of the workforce of 250,000 redundant. The resistance of the workers has been weakened by conjuring up Hindu-Marathi chauvinism, by getting the underworld as the agents of the real estate developers and the hay-making politicians, the NGOs interested in creating a 'clean' Mumbai, and ironically enough a structurally adjusted judiciary which has overruled the claims of fundamental rights of the workers enshrined in the Constitution, in order to turn the middle class localities free of working class pollution.

Migration from rural areas has yet been a factor, but not a predominant factor in the further congestion of cities all suffering from inadequate infrastructure, especially inadequate access of the poor to transport, clean water, toilet facilities and schools and hospitals. Reading Utsa Patnaik's paper on the condition of farmers and other workers dependent on agriculture under the neoliberal dispensation, and Ravi Srivasatava's paper on the scale of temporary inland mobility, I have a suspicion that soon we will witness a much bigger wave of migrants from rural to urban areas. Amitabh Kundu in his usual style has written a thoroughly researched paper and demonstrated that while regional disparity is a factor behind interstate migration, the flow of permanent migration has systematically declined from 1961 to 1999. He cites the assertion of regional identities as one possible reason for this. On the other hand, there is some evidence that interstate mobility among the educated population has increased in recent years. This may be another illustration of the increasing elite unity, combined with a structurally effected or propaganda-manipulated fragmentation among the poorer people.

Not content with the economic instruments such as a deregulated stock market, hobbling the laws restricting the arbitrary behaviour of employers, the re-introduction of a one way free trade, the downgrading of the system of directed credit and reversal of expansion of rural branches of banks, the pampering of the rich through the fiscal arrangements, the rich and their clients are out to exclude the common people from anything the wealthy might want (as witnessed in their strategies for grabbing prime land in industrially devastated locales). The Central government has through its policies bankrupted practically all state governments and rendered them dependent either on the grants of the Central government or on external aid (both of which arrangements often carry unacceptable conditionalities) and rendered the states increasingly incapable of carrying out their constitutional mandates in the areas of health, education, and gender justice. How can Balveer Arora ('From reluctant to robust federalism: the development of India's political institutions') maintain his optimism about an increasingly federalized India? Should he not turn to examine the distance between rhetoric and reality, and the difference between manouevring for short-term political goals and the long-term interests of the affluent classes, which direct the Central and most other state governments?

In his brilliant paper, Satish Deshpande demonstrates that the 'middle classes' who are supposed, according to the dominant media, to guide India's destiny in the current conjuncture are really the affluent class consisting of at most the top 15 per cent of the Indian population. He has also shown that among the affluent, the Hindus other than the scheduled castes are over-represented (as are the minority communities of Sikhs and Christians) and the scheduled castes and Muslims are grossly underrepresented. Even more disturbingly over the period 1983-2000, the degree of under-representation of these communities has increased. Rural Sikhs on the contrary has increased among the affluent at a staggering rate. (There are problems with comparability of the data but that would not upset the basic conclusions).

I had argued earlier that there are barriers to entry even into ordinary business ventures posed by the dominance of certain Hindu communities and the Muslims suffer from that. I would extend that argument to also many other groups and especially those belonging to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes except where the latter are the majority community. Papers by Jeemol Unni and Sukhdeo Thorat address issues of discrimination on the basis of caste, the former focusing on the rise of the intermediate castes and the latter on the experience of scheduled castes (dalits) in wage employment. Unni explains how the intermediate castes, most of whom belong to the official category of OBCs have come to accept the strongly brahminical values of the Hindutva-mongerers. Two explanations can be offered for this. In some cases such as the Shaivite Pillais of Kerala and Tamil Nadu, the reformist leaders had introduced strictly *shastric* practices such as vegetarianism as a way of elevating the status of the caste in the hierarchy. In Gujarat, apart from the fact that brahmins had never been powerful socially at least since the times of Mughal rule, the rise of Dayanand Saraswati preaching militant Hinduism in opposition to the quietist Vallabhacharya sect and the emergence of the Swaminarayan sect among the Patidars prepared a fertile ground for sectarian Hinduism. The second explanation would be the aspiration of the up and coming sections among the OBCs (and unfortunately, similar groups among the dalits as well) to be accepted by the already successful, and the latter are in terms of education, economic status and upward mobility still on top of Indian society. Neoliberal policies have mostly negated the little benefit the dalits used to derive from positive discrimination and have further strengthened the grip of the Hindu upper castes on the levers of power. Ironically enough, the growth of aspiration for a better life has made many disadvantaged groups more tolerant of inequality and its accompanying ideology, because the dominant ideological apparatuses refuse to acknowledge that there is a better future in social equality for them.

Sukhdeo Thorat not only documents the pervasive discrimination that dalits suffer in all aspects of wage employment: they have a lower share of regular employment than others, they are corralled by society into low-wage niches, they suffer more from unemployment and in many cases, especially in rural areas, they are paid less for the same work than others, and finally, the head count of poverty among them is much higher than the average for others. Thorat makes the point that these shameful outcomes can be seen as the outcome of the caste system as conceived by Ambedkar: 'The relevant economic outcomes of the caste system…(a) allocation of economic rights, particularly property rights for each caste by birth and continuance thereof by heredity, unequal distribution of property rights among caste groups, (c) hierarchization of economic activities in terms of status and dignity…, (d) a comprehensive system of social and economic ostracism to enforce the caste-based economic order, and finally (e) ideological justification from Hindu religious philosophy' (p. 314).

Given this cluster of disabilities pressing the dalits down, when the constitution-framers provided for positive discrimination for them, without insisting on countrywide land reforms giving land to the small peasant and the agricultural labourer, they made sure that much of that reservation for

Dalits would remain on paper. What was true in 1950 remains true today. On top of that, we have a crisis in agriculture, a crisis in nutrition and health (as the papers by Utsa Patnaik, and by V. K. Ramachandran and Madhura Swaminathan bring out with their usual perspicacity), a crisis in employment and a failed agenda of women's empowerment (as the acute analysis of Uma Chakravarti, in the only paper that focuses on gender issues, demonstrates). Capitalism has been a system which on the one hand put forward promises and aspirations and on the other hand it has systematically betrayed those promises, and created new problems. It has also been adept at utilizing pre-capitalist structures and ideologies to create bases for exploitation of the labouring class and keeping them divided, as it has done with the caste system in India. It has generated new fissures and created new fragments as industries and industrial locations have risen and collapsed. With such turbulent changes have come up claims for new identities: vast numbers of the oppressed Irish on arrival in the promised land of the USA became racist blacklegs in service of white employers.

But the fog of doublespeak that ideologues of capitalism have always practised has never been more obfuscating and the invocation of false identities to strengthen the power of the wealthy and create conflicts among the dispossessed has never been more clamorous than in the age of neoliberalism spreading like a miasma across the world since the beginning of the 1980s. Pradip Kumar Datta's observation that between the years of the rise of Mahatma Gandhi and the demise of Nehru, the 'middle class' was subordinated to the morality of a transcendent nationalism, distancing itself from Hinduism-obsessed past and future makes sense if we understand that that middle class was very different from the middle class as redefined by Deshpande. The latter class had been the greatest beneficiaries of the policies of state patronage without social change and they wanted more, which they thought they would obtain under a new dispensation (see Prabhat Patnaik's essay in this collection). It was not a demand for a new morality that guided that class. Wasn't Shiv Sena's record enough proof of what to expect from the Hindu chauvinists? Wasn't Indira Gandhi herself trying to woo a Hindu electorate from the time she came back to power? After all, the Central government looked on indifferently when the Babri Masjid was demolished. Again, despite all its initial slogans of Swadeshi, the 'reforms' of the Narasimha Rao government were carried seamlessly forward by its NDA successor. The economic interests of a middle class willing to serve the imperial powers and its exclusionary ideology cannot be separated in the way that some political scientists try to do. The new policies centring on reservations may be a soft option for the Central government, but the affluent regard it as a wedge to re-open, in the public domain, the issues of social justice and social change, otherwise why would they be so agitated about those policies?

In their well-documented paper on the dimensions and use of remittances from the Gulf countries, S. Raju and S. K. Sasikumar point out that the accession of new wealth has not resulted in new productive investments in Kerala but to a surge in consumption and a boom in real estate business. That again underlines the anti-productivity bias that is built into a peripheral, neoliberal regime. Virginius Xaxa emphasizes the point that the so-called 'tribes' do not regard themselves as 'tribes'. Why should they? We are all tribes but some of us have arrogated to themselves the right to define a standard that others should emulate. Xaxa's paper also underscores the oppressive nature of identities imposed by others. The freedom to choose one's identity is not given to most members of underprivileged or oppressed groups. That freedom is also connected with the other basic rights such as the right to education, nutrition, health, freedom of occupation, employment with dignity and civil and political rights to guard the other rights.

This is a rather long review, but this is an important book, and it touches on most of the basic problems Indian people are grappling with. So instead of apologizing, I end by hoping that it will be widely read and discussed.■

Amiya Kumar Bagchi is a social scientist and Director of the Institute of Development Studies Kolkata. His latest book is *Perilous Passage: Mankind and the Global Ascendancy of Capital*, Indian edition, Oxford University Press, 2006.

Mammon and Mankind

C.P. Chandrasekhar

PERILOUS PASSAGE: MANKIND AND THE GLOBAL ASCENDANCY OF CAPITAL
By Amiya Kumar Bagchi
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006, pp. xxvi+426, Rs. 695.00

The best economic history mines data from the past to establish distinct patterns, impute causal effects and unravel the mechanisms that drive economic sub-systems. But given the demands set by scholarship based on archival records and atypical sources, the advance of knowledge often tends to be marginal and yet controversial. Innovative discussions on local or sectoral developments are so specialized in terms of subject matter that they are known only to researchers in the same or allied fields. But as the output of such scholarship accumulates the potential for analyses that provide the big picture increases. Despite some gaps or inadequacies of evidence, through such analyses, the larger story of the dynamic of whole systems can be told. The best scholars among those who have muddied their hands analysing the microcosm, with the erudition needed to cover the experience of many continents and examine the process of economic and social evolution over centuries, can step back and synthesize the results yielded by the efforts of many others, besides their own.

When pursuing history writing of this kind, it is inevitable that the predilections of individual historians are bound to influence the data filtered, the patterns read and the causal forces imputed. Hence, differences in the interpretation of the dynamic of history and its implications are substantial and characterized by a high degree of partisanship. However, for the reader, history of this kind is most interesting, especially when it validates and enriches perspectives derived from a reading of the present.

From the point of view of relevance to the present, it is the history of capitalism as it evolved over a period of four centuries that is most fascinating. But this can also be the most controversial and partisan of economic histories, given the fact that different attitudes to the present can be justified by different readings of that past. The volume under review is one more contribution to the synthetic histories of capitalism, sited clearly in a tradition deriving from Marx. It shares with some, though not all, of them, the erudition, the organizational ingenuity and the power of reasoning needed to make the exercise worthwhile for the reader.

But it also stands above many such earlier attempts for a number of other reasons. First, a factor motivating the exercise is the need to go beyond conventional economic histories focusing on the expansion and diversification of capitalist production, to examine the effect this had on the quality of life of those who populated the lands that capitalism encompassed.

Second, in doing so, it challenges the view that the rise to dominance of Europe and its settlements, was the result of a long period of evolution starting around the tenth century that delivered the material for competitive success and a better quality of life to its populations. Rather, Bagchi argues, there is little evidence to support the view that Europe had any competitive edge over India and China in the period prior to the Industrial Revolution. Moreover, despite the Industrial Revolution, the population of Europe did not enjoy the benefits of a reasonably long life, decent health, widespread literacy, sizeable education and adequate individual freedom before the dawning of the twentieth century. Thus, for example, the evidence garnered by Bagchi suggests that, contrary to common perception, during the 1600s and 1700s the rate of growth of the populations of India and China was greater than that in Europe,

Third, the book marshals evidence to establish that the success of western capitalism starting with the Industrial Revolution was the result not just of newfound competitive capacities, but of subjugation based on war and occupation epitomized by the role of the slave trade in lubricating the

capitalist mechanism. This was of course the starkest of many crude ways through which surplus was transferred from the periphery to the metropolis and then on to the regions of recent settlement. That is, the success of capitalism in the metropolis was tied to and dependent on the subjugation and colonization of the periphery. What is more, commodities such as sugar produced in the slave-run plantations directly contributed to well being in Europe by adding significantly to the calorie intake of European populations.

Finally, the book contests the ideologies that accompanied the rise to ascendance of capital, which presented its aggressive and gory expansion as a civilizing mission that the superior European races had to undertake in the ultimate good interests of the inferior populations they subjugated. They even present the military success of the West as the outcome of a form of economic Darwinism in which the economically superior bested the less capable on whom resources could not be wasted.

This apologetic view does not, of course, take into account the fact that the benefits of capitalist success accrued to a miniscule elite even in Europe through much of its history. The process of capitalist development right up to the nineteenth century proved inadequate to substantially transform the quality of life of most Europeans, let alone the non-white populations devastated by European conquest. Bagchi collates wide-ranging evidence to establish the poor and even declining status of Europeans as measured by longevity, health, literacy and education during the seventeenth, eighteenth and even nineteenth centuries. Often the evidence cited is based on an unusual range of data sets: figures on the population of and burials in Aix-en-Provence in France in 1695; the heights of women convicts transported from England and Ireland to the penal colony of New South Wales between 1800 and 1815 and of East India Company recruits in the United Kingdom between 1815 and 1860; the ability of Dutch brides and grooms to sign their names in marriage registers in the 1670s; and so on. All of them point to the disjunction between the economic expansion of Europe and the improvement in the quality of life of its populations.

According to Bagchi, three developments during the last quarter of the 19th century changed matters with regard to the quality of life in Europe. These were: the prophylactic measures resulting from the development of the germ theory of disease; the migration of European populations to the United States, Canada and other regions of recent settlement; and the emergence of workers' resistance and democratic movements that forced governments to respond with improved health and educational provision as well as measures aimed at protecting workers, which extended to the 1980s and after, excepting for breaks during the years of fascist success. These were the developments that made the last quarter of the nineteenth century the second "axial age" after the Industrial Revolution. The first witnessed the separation of output and productivity expansion in the developed countries of today from that in the underdeveloped countries. The second saw the beginning of a process of divergence of human development in present day advanced countries and the rest of the world

This was obviously because the belated improvement in human development indicators in Europe did not spread in adequate measure to the regions outside the metropolitan centres of capitalism. One reason for this was the integration into the empire of capital of the underdeveloped regions initially as sites of plunder to finance capitalist accumulation in the metropolis, then as sources of raw material for metropolitan production and finally as markets for metropolitan produce. All of these involved a drain of surpluses that deprived them of resources that could be used to defray the costs of public provision and intervention needed to make a difference to the quality of life. Another reason was that many of them remained colonies well into the twentieth century, and colonial governments, their civilizing rhetoric notwithstanding, were not interested in improving the quality of life of native populations, other than in cases (illustrated by Macaulay's educational agenda) where it was needed to support the colonial administration.

The net result was that developments after the late nineteenth century radically separated the literacy levels, longevity, educational standards and overall quality of life of the early industrialisers that are now the advanced nations from that in underdeveloped areas of the world today. There was, of course a period of respite in the three decades following the Second World War, when many newly independent underdeveloped countries accelerated the pace of human development advance through public action adopted by national governments. However, progress was limited and inadequate. And, hopes of a substantial closing of the gaps in human development achievement in the developed and underdeveloped countries have been belied by the outcomes observed during the integrationist epoch that began in the 1980s. Globalization has slowed progress on the human development front and widened global disparities in many areas.

Developments during these years were not chance events but a part of the logic of capitalist ascendancy. The era of what is loosely and even euphemistically termed globalization is in Bagchi's perspective the result of the challenge to capitalist hegemony led by the US that came from the strengthened bargaining power of workers in the developed countries, the increased clout of the now politically independent developing countries and the challenge posed by the socialist, centrally planned economies, especially the Soviet Union and China. In response capitalism had to reconstitute itself in ways that can deal with these challenges.

The form the response took involved the rise to dominance of finance capital, which paved the way for the accelerated integration of differentially developed regions of the world by breaking down barriers to the flow of capital, especially financial capital. This was the period when developing country governments were forced or persuaded into adopting open-door policies of a kind that Bagchi's historical elaboration establishes the developed countries never followed at similar levels of development or even subsequently. The net result was slower growth in whole continents, such as during the "lost decades" in Latin America; economic devastation, as in Africa; greater volatility, as in emerging markets prone to financial crises; and a slow down in or reversal of advance on the human development front even in countries that managed to perform well in terms of GDP growth, such as China and India. Capitalism has been successful, socialism is in retreat, capitalist aggression has increased led by the sole military superpower the US, and much of the world's population benefits little in terms of the quality of life resulting in a widening of global disparities of various kinds.

Bagchi's effort to track an all-embracing problematic through a trajectory unfolding over centuries is convincing because he backs his central arguments with evidence that spans centuries and straddles many areas of human life. He is also meticulous in his use of data, taking account of their inevitable limitations and their degree of reliability. But at the end of this apparently discursive but actually extremely focused exercise, he is able to drive home his conclusion that behind the rise to ascendancy of capital is "a compulsive drive for power and pelf at the cost of virtually all human values".

This is a comprehensive rebuttal of the view that at all points of time the developed countries of the day provide the less developed an image of their own future. That view inadequately comprehended the crucial role played by the conquest and devastation of the periphery in the successful development of the metropolis. It is also a damaging critique of the view of self-centred elites in the underdeveloped countries who clamour for a recasting of developing country economic structures and policies in the image of what prevails in the Anglo-Saxon metropolis. That might benefit a small elite in the periphery, but finally only serves the interest of capital rooted in the metropolis. A historical reading of the logic of capitalist expansion makes clear that it can have a "human face" only for a few. As Bagchi notes: "One of the defining characteristics of capitalism has been a contradiction between its universalist claims (being unlike feudalism, ancient slavery, or caste-based systems in this respect) and the delivery of substantive gains to only segments of the population, leaving others in privation."

The relevance of these conclusions for a reading of the present is obvious. Given the dominance of a discredited neoliberal ideology in the age of finance, this enormous contribution by Professor Bagchi is timely. That it comes with the erudition, research and authority that he brings to the task is inspiring.■

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Information and Communication Technologies (ICT): Hype or Reality?

Prabir Purkayastha

DIGITAL INDIA: RURAL EMPOWERMENT AND TRANSFORMATION
By D.K. Ghosh
UBS Publishers and Distributors, Delhi, 2006, pp. 283, Rs. 475.00

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) is obviously one of the major forces currently shaping the contours of our society. It is changing the way we interact with others, the way we do business and the way we entertain ourselves. Obviously any technology which causes such profound change in the way we live would also have similar implications for rural India. D.K. Ghosh's book seeks to provide a guide to the potential of ICT for our villages. D.K. Ghosh is an Executive Director in the Public Communication Networks Division of Siemens and is therefore well placed to judge the nature and impact on rural India digital technologies.

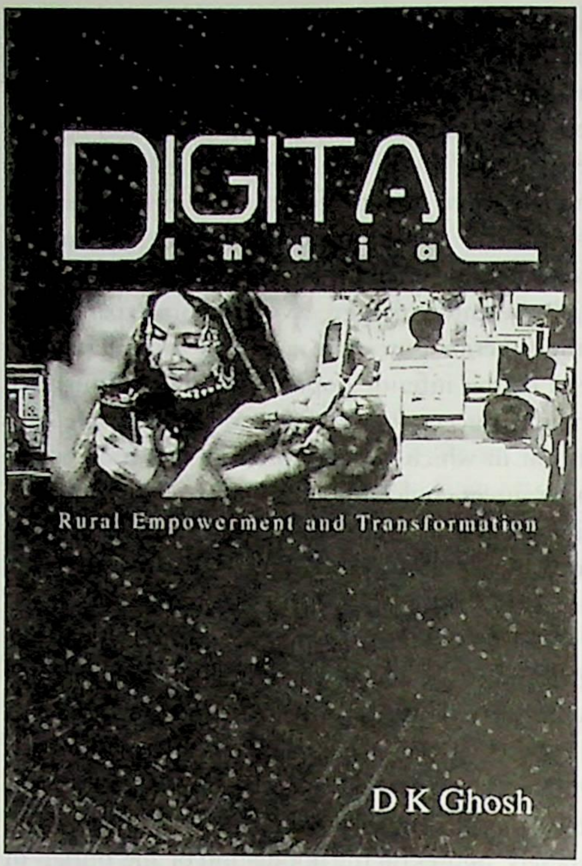
The problem, however, with the simple narrative that Ghosh provides is that it is a triumphalist account of technology, in which all possible gains are listed and it is assumed that all of this would automatically lead to a better future. Such a narrative misses out the complexity of both the society within which such changes take place as also the complex relations between technology and society.

To enumerate all benefits of current digital and communication technologies for rural areas is quite simple. All one needs for such an exercise is to pick up the brochures of companies selling such technologies or reports of organizations promoting experiments using these technologies

Undoubtedly, Ghosh's book does provide a broad summary of various projects that are being done by the Governmental agencies, corporate houses and non-governmental organizations. Such an overview is certainly useful as a compendium of facts. However, if we pick up a book, we expect that not only should there be such a compilation but also a reflective view of the nature of changes that are likely to be brought about. After all, it is very rare in the world that we have unmixed blessings – any technological change, even if it is largely beneficial, is also likely to bring in some effects ill-effects in its wake. What Ghosh's book misses is this critical examination of technology and its impact. What we have, instead, is massive doses of facts after facts after facts, statistics after statistics after statistics, till the reader is completely overwhelmed. What is missed is the woods for the trees. The only conclusion that Ghosh would like us to have from this relentless procession of factual information is that ICT would somehow generate employment, better health, food, economic development, and all of these without tears.

Ghosh starts from the premise that the magic wand of ICT will do what the last 60 years of bad governance and wrong policies in independent India have failed to do, i.e. provide economic development, virtually for free. In this, he examines experiments of corporate houses such as the e-chaupal initiative of ITC, e-governance initiatives by the government, telecom experiments in Bengal by an NGO, and so on. All of these are interesting projects in themselves. However, none of them resolve into a holistic look at how such technologies can get us into the Promised Land: a land of milk and honey, free of sharp disparities. What are the investments involved? Who would be the players? Would there be a need for a task force for each of these activities, or would these happen without any state or other interventions? What supporting structures are required for an ICT revolution to take place in the rural areas? Without such a holistic view, it is difficult to take seriously that ICT by itself and without concerted development in other fields—roads, electricity, water, etc.—would automatically get us to this Promised Land.

Ghosh has an optimistic, even a naive view of technology in which he does not look at its flip side. Technologies that can lead to human



development, can also lead to increasing the intensity of exploitation. In a world where information is power, those who have better access, can leverage this power to create sharper disparities. Both societal development and sharpening of the social divide can even run side by side. How society addresses these two issues, determines the way people view technology: if it leads to the cake not only enlarging but also the absolute share for all sections improving, such technological change will be welcomed. If it leads to a disproportionate share of the cake going to the information haves while the have-nots languish with their shares remaining constant or even going down, it is unlikely that those at the receiving end of this brave, new information age will welcome it with open arms.

Ghosh not only fails to make a critical examination regarding ICT, he also approvingly quotes the international experience of providing, for example, education without teachers, working from home, etc. However do we really want our children learning without a human teacher, from a radio, TV or a computer? Do we want to do away with schools, substituting them with this home based self-learning model? Do we think that death of the work place is a good idea, as it will cut down on travelling and therefore greenhouse emissions? Here is the ultimate panacea of technology, give me a social problem and I will find a technology fix for it. It is this attempt to fix such problems with more and more technology that we need to critically examine. Problems have an unpleasant habit of biting back, and in solving one lot, we should not create even bigger ones.

Let us take schools and human teachers. Yes, upgrading teachers' skills and providing teaching aids using digital or other electronic tools is a great idea. Doing away with schools and teachers is a very bad one. Learning is not about facts, but developing innate abilities of generating patterns out of such facts and creating a sense of a shared world in which we play by some "rules". Every child is unique and a standardized one-size-fits-all education model would be a pedagogical disaster. Similarly, there are other options to reduce travel and greenhouse emissions: mass transport and better urban planning. Instead of picking up the suburbia model as we seem to now have done in the country, alternate models of urban planning exists that would also minimize travel. To a number of people including me, a world where everybody lives atomized existences, working from home, with no schools and all human contacts mediated largely through the electronic medium, is a picture not of an utopia but a dystopia.

The world views technology with a certain degree of scepticism precisely because of our failure to address the sharpening of societal divisions with the development of technology. Unless we can address the issues of technology and societal development together, an account of the type Ghosh presents in this book would tend to be regarded more as hype than as future reality.■

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Reliving A Legend

Partho Datta

BEGUM AKHTAR: THE STORY OF MY AMMI
By Shanti Hiranand
Viva Books, Delhi, 2005, pp.170, Rs.1295.00

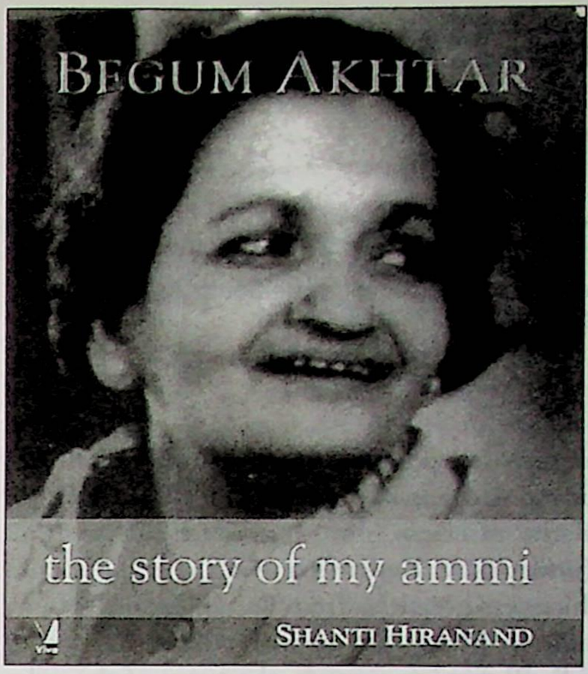
This may be a cliché but Begum Akhtar was like the proverbial *shama* to which countless *parwanas* have lost their souls. Stories about her life are legendary and add to the mystique of her musical personality. There is for instance the famous one about a poet in Lucknow driven mad by her music who roamed the streets scrawling her name on walls. Then there is the unconfirmed but widely believed account of her enthronement by the Rampur Nawab and her dramatic escape from the stifling atmosphere of the court and demands of her patron. In the 1950s she emerged as the eminently respectable wife of Ishtiaq Ahmed Ansari a lawyer in Lucknow. Her transformation from Akhtaribai Faizabadi, the famous singer-courtesan to upper class housewife was complete.

It was at this time that young Shanti Hiranand entered the household at 1, Havelock Road. She was an young enthusiast who frequently sang at the Lucknow, AIR. Her producer had suggested that she learn more seriously and that was how she hesitatingly reached Begum Akhtar's door. Hiranand's life was transformed by this encounter as her discipleship ensured her a place in Begum Akhtar's household. This charming, frank and moving memoir of her beloved *Ammi* gives us an intimate and sometimes vivid glimpse of Begum Akhtar's personality.

There have been other memoirs too which dwell on other facets of Begum Akhtar's public and private life. The late Sheila Dhar has a fascinating account about her own troubled devotion in *Here's Someone I Would Like You To Meet* which is now available in the omnibus volume *Raga'n Josh* (Permanent Black, 2005). Rita Kothari's Bengali reminiscence *Bai thekey Begum* was published in the literary periodical *Desh*. Some years ago S.Kalidas produced an excellent documentary that had a range of interviews with her admirers. But Hiranand's memoir is special. She and Anjali Bannerjee were the only two *ganda-bandh shagirds* (formally initiated disciples) of Begum Akhtar. This is an insider's view and therefore all the more valuable.

If on reading this book one gets nostalgic about Begum Akhtar's music, then luckily loads of it is available and readily. HMV has brought out numerous sets from her old L.P.s. Megaphone of Calcutta has reissued in two albums her early 78 rpms. Live recordings from the 1950s and 60s are also now widely available. Thanks to Kishore Merchant, three volumes of private *baithaks* from 1957 in Bombay at the residence of his grandfather Khatau Valabhdas have been issued by Sony. Bihaan Records of Calcutta has one from Jnanprakash Ghose's music circle Jhankar. Doordarshan even has a VCD anthology from its archives. And those who want a glimpse of a younger Begum Akhtar, there is the five minute gem of a sequence in Satyajit Ray's *Jalshaghar* (1957).

This may be a cliché but Begum Akhtar was like the proverbial *shama* to which countless *parwanas* have lost their souls. Stories about her life are legendary and add to the mystique of her musical personality. There is for instance the famous one about a poet in Lucknow driven mad by her music who roamed the streets scrawling her name on walls.



Hiranand tells us of the varied household in Havelock Road comprising of close and distant relatives and numerous hanger-ons, over all of whom Begum Akhtar presided. Their constant presence was a reminder of her shadowy and hidden past. Jhamman Mamu had been inherited from her mother Mushtri Begum's establishment. His job was to tell made-up fairy stories and lull the large family to sleep on hot summer nights. There was the demure Shammo, her adopted sister, who was also rumoured to be her daughter. Shammo was married off to many men by Begum Akhtar including her tabla accompanist Munne Khan. Shammo had numerous children by her various husbands on all of whom the childless Begum Akhtar doted. Friends like Benazir and Zohra were from a courtesan family and it was to their home that Begum Akhtar escaped occasionally when eminent musicians like tabla maestro Ahmed Jan Thirakwa visited Lucknow. There was an orgy of singing, drinking and merry making for days on end. Having had her fill, she would return once more to the respectable life of a Begum on Havelock Road. The only educated one in this mad medley was Shama, a cousin by marriage. She was deputed to look after household accounts and later joined a government office. Her husband Ishtiaq Abbasi was aloof and formal but Begum Akhtar enjoyed a coy relationship with him. Apparently he helped her develop a taste for refined Urdu verse.

There are some wonderful stories about her music too. *Talim* (lessons) from the reclusive Anjanibai Malpekar of the Bhendi Bazar *gharana* in Bombay where Begum Akhtar picked up the *dadra*, "Main toh torey damanwa lagi maharaj" (subsequently recorded by Hiranand for the film *Dance of the Winds)*. In fact a fragment of this lesson in Raga Bhairavi has survived on tape and is much sought after by collectors and aficionados. Learning sessions with Gullubhai Jasdanwala the rich stud farm owner and amateur disciple of Alladiya Khan also followed. He taught her the Jaipur-Atrauli speciality Raga Bahaduri Todi. Interactive sessions also with her admirer the Hindi film music composer Madan Mohan whom she playfully accused of lifting her tunes. Another admirer Kumar Gandharva never forgot to visit her home when he came to Lucknow. She even cajoled the serious minded Amir Khan to sing a *thumri* !

Hiranand candidly narrates her own development as a singer. Her relationship with Begum Akhtar went through many ups and downs especially when other favourite disciples entered the household. There was plenty of sulking and weeping between teacher and disciple but it seems all these made the bonds even firmer. Hiranand is also frank about her marriage. Her husband was both supportive and resentful of Hiranand's busy career. There are two parallel stories in this book which social historians of music have begun to explore now. One is the domestication of the courtesan tradition and the other is the absorption and legitimization of classical music among the middle classes. Both histories were fraught with tensions where private and the public entangled hopelessly.

The book is well produced but outrageously priced. There are numerous photographs yet none of them are dated or captioned. The allure of photoshop is more than apparent in the numerous *sitars* and *dholaks* that are unnecessarily strewn throughout the pages.■

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A Unique Entity

Irfan Zuberi

HINDI FILM SONG: MUSIC BEYOND BOUNDARIES
By Ashok D. Ranade
Promilla & Co. Publishers in association with Bibliophile South Asia, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 437, Rs. 495.00

Ranade fully succeeds in his task to carry out middle-level research and, as in the past, has shown the way to researchers in the field of popular music. The book would be a treat for movie buffs, film song lovers and of course, scholars of popular culture and cinema studies.

Hindi film songs are immensely popular throughout the length and breadth of the country and appeal to people of all age groups. Such was the popularity of Hindi film songs as far back as 1952 that when All India Radio (under B. V. Keskar) banned the airing of film music, 'Binaca Geetmala', which was broadcast from Radio Ceylon, became a major success across the country. This forced AIR to rethink its ban and, in 1957, it introduced 'Vividh Bharati' to cater to the tastes of the radio listeners. What makes Hindi film songs tick? How do they cut across all boundaries and appeal to such a wide variety of people from diverse backgrounds? These questions probe sociologists, musicologists, ethnomusicologists and scholars of popular culture and cinema studies to study this uniquely Indian phenomenon.

As one of India's leading ethnomusicologists, Dr. Ashok Ranade undertakes an analysis of the composers and voices working behind the Hindi film song noting historical developments and discussing aesthetic issues in an attempt to trace its complete musical profile. Ranade carries out what he chooses to call 'middle-level research' in Hindi film music – rising above analysis and interpretation of individual songs yet not excluding concrete evidence for want of big theories to explain everything. The structure of the book makes it accessible to the scholar as much as to the lay reader. It has been divided into three sections: landmarks in Hindi film music, early amd later composers and major and minor voices broadly spanning the period 1930-80. The three distinct phases which have been covered in this period are the talkie phase, studio phase and finally the, industry phase. The methodology employed is the analysis of the styles and contributions of individual composers and playback singers – the two pillars of the Hindi film song – and using them to reflect upon each other to create a clearer picture.

The historical and theoretical moorings of the subject matter have not been left unexplored by Ranade. He undertakes an analysis of the principles of Bharata's *Natyashastra* and goes on to put forth the aesthetic principles which govern the relationship between the auditory and the visual in film music. In this regard, one is truly surprised to read about the foresight of Bharata when he said that the 'song' could either by sung by the actor himself/herself or by another – in light of this evidence, it is truly tempting to trace the notion of playback singing back to the early aestheticians!

Ranade's approach to the subject is clear and systematic. Thus, the parent category of popular music has been analysed thoroughly outlining and detailing its chief characteristics before he delves into the specific genre of the Hindi film song. Notable among the features of the genus are willingness to borrow from other musical cultures and genres, inclusive approach to music-making, exploitation of musical conventions, noticeable topicality and limited shelf life. How all of these features apply to the Hindi film song becomes evident during the course of the book.

In light of the chief roles played by film music, Ranade invokes the views of the famous composer Aaron Copeland which are worth reproducing as a bird's eye-view into the genre. Film music:

(i) establishes a convincing atmosphere of time and space;
(ii) underlines unspoken feelings or psychological states of characters;
(iii) serves as neutral background filler for action;
(iv) provides a sense of continuity to editing; and
(v) accentuates dramatic build-up of a scene and rounds it off to finality.

However, these points do not encompass the entity which is unique to the Hindi film – the film song. Its varieties and characteristics are not easy to pin down in light of the various ways in which it has been (and continues to be) employed and moulded by various music composers over the years.

Ranade credits Naushad with meaningfully tightening the musical concept of a 'film song' as distinct from 'singing in a film'. For Ranade, it was Naushad who made the Hindi film song a unified entity with a musical introduction, followed by a refrain, a musical interlude, about three stanzas, and perhaps an end-flourish. Meticulous planning, rigorous rehearsals and resourceful recording characterized Naushad's work-ethic and ensured this long-lasting contribution to the genre. Later in the book, Ranade adds that if Naushad helped the process of crystallization of the format of the Hindi film song, it was S. D. Burman who extended the scope of its content.

Numerous anecdotes regarding various music composers and playback singers abound in these pages. For example, it is interesting to note that, in 1937, J. B. H. Wadia's film *Naujawan* was hooted out of the theatres in Delhi because it did not have a single song. The public hurled stones shouting, "Wadia ne loot liya". Such is the hold of the Hindi film song over the cinemagoers! Madan Mohan fans would be surprised to know that much before he became an ace composer and a force to reckon with in the industry, he used to be in the army and was due to be made Lieutenant but did not make it because he was late in saluting the Union Jack!

However, there are a few inconsistencies in the book. The section heading on Naushad gives his date of demise and the text below speaks of him as being with us to throw light on the various phases which Hindi film music has passed through. Another noteworthy point is the scant bibliography. Barring a couple of recent works, most of the literature which has been referred to is from the 1970s. This seems rather surprising considering the amount of work being carried out in the field of popular culture and cinema studies. Similarly, the statistics cited come up to 1995 whereas the textual analysis hardly goes beyond 1980 introducing a mismatch. A sore point regarding the layout is the excessive usage of exclamation. For example, 9 out of 12 sentences on the first page of the opening chapter end with an exclamation mark bringing down the seriousness of Ranade's endeavour. On the part of the publisher, the index has been poorly done with chapter names featuring in it.

In any case, the aforementioned points are small glitches in a splendid journey on which Ranade takes his readers. All lovers of film music would find something in the book which appeals to them – whether it is the short biographical sketches of the composers and playback singers, the analysis of individual styles and contributions or just a trip down memory lane! All of these elements become even more pleasurable because of Ranade's clear and lucid use of language and intelligent organization of the material presented. It remains to be said that Ranade fully succeeds in his task to carry out middle-level research and, as in the past, has shown the way to researchers in the field of popular music. The book would be a treat for movie buffs, film song lovers and of course, scholars of popular culture and cinema studies.■

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The Progressives' Progress

Harish Trivedi

THE LIGHT: A HISTORY OF THE MOVEMENT FOR PROGRESSIVE LITERATURE IN THE INDO-PAK SUBCONTINET
By Sajjad Zaheer. Translated from the Urdu by Amina Azfar.
Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2006, pp. 301, (Pakistani) Rs 495.00

LITERARY RADICALISM IN INDIA: GENDER, NATION AND THE TRANSITION TO INDEPENDENCE
By Priyamvada Gopal
Routledge, London, Indian reprint 2005, pp. 177, price in bar code.

Sajjad Zaheer (1905-1973), whose birth-centenary year has just passed, was a central figure in the movement for progressive literature in India, perhaps rather more as an organizer, propagator and editor than as a writer himself. It is symptomatic that while the occasion of reverent remembrance has brought forth a welcome translation of his memoir of the early progress of the Progressive Writers' Movement, in Urdu titled *Roshnai* and in this lively but often erratic translation somewhat pretentiously titled *The Light,* his major creative work, the novella *London ki Ek Raat* (A London Night) yet awaits an afterlife in English.

On the evidence of this intimate, conversational and rambling memoir, and also on the basis of all the other evidence that there is (such as collected by Ali Baquer in *A Tribute to Sajjad Zaheer: The Pen and the Vision*, 1987), Sajjad Zaheer seems to have been a truly civilized, cultured and charming man. Though he was by temperament reticent and reclusive, he apparently had a gift for making and keeping friends and an ability to assess immediately and acutely the personality traits of everyone he met. As a result, this account by him of the first ten or fifteen years of the growth of the Progressive Writers' Association (depending on whether one dates its beginnings from London or from Lucknow) is remarkable, above all else, for the vivid scenes he paints of the many places he travelled to in order to spread the progressive message, and for his lively and even picturesque portraits of the numerous literary figures he met and befriended. This is not a book of dry ideas and arguments; it is soaked right through in the sheer relish of everyday life and human bonding.

Sajjad Zaheer was the son of Sir Syed Wazir Hasan and was educated at Oxford and London. He was already converted to Communism by 1928, and was one of the group of half a dozen Indian students who together drafted in London in 1935 the manifesto of the Indian Progressive Writers' Association. On returning to India, he organized in 1936 in Lucknow the first conference of the Association, at which Premchand gave his celebrated presidential address, "The Purpose of Literature"; this incipient moment burns bright as a beacon not only in this book but even more in the legends of the Progressive movement. The second and third conferences, however, were presided over by Rabindranath Tagore and Sarojini Naidu, respectively. A major strategy of the movement in that early phase seems to have been to sign up as many major writers as it could possibly muster, whatever their political hue.

In his own vivid anecdotal way, Sajjad Zaheer does at times touch upon the many ideological issues that came up during these campaigns to enlist. As early as December 1935 at a meeting at Sajjad Zaheer's (or rather his father's) opulent house, Munshi Daya Narayan Nigam, editor of the influential Urdu journal *Zamana* and bosom friend of Premchand, praised the carpet on which they stood and said to Zaheer with a smile: "If I owned such a valuable carpet I too would harp on about the peasants and the workers." As Zaheer reports: "Everyone laughed at this quip and I was quite embarrassed."

Zaheer's strange and stirring life-story, from its *baba log* beginnings to a trajectory of high radical endeavour, sustained throughout by (among other things) his love of literature in four or five languages including Persian and French, still awaits the right biographer.

Later, at a meeting with local writers in Lahore (again, on a "beautiful lawn" fringed with "large, colourful chrysanthemums," though no one apparently issuized the ambience this time), many key questions were raised which, Zaheer says, "were discussed for years to come and are still being discussed today." These included: Should writers necessarily be activists? How should ancient classical literature be viewed, including lyrical love poetry? What was the Progressive view of Ghalib or Shakespeare? Why was literature about the common man not written in the language of the common man? And, what was the Progressive stance on religion? "It was difficult," recounts Zaheer, "to give a definitive answer to many of these questions. I said what came to my mind. Others also expressed their views, and many of the issues were clarified." This may sound "delightfully vague" (as Nehru once said Gandhi tended to be on economic questions) but then, this is a delightful rather than a didactic book, and not even always politically correct.

In any case, so far as Zaheer's own life and political career are concerned, this book may be said to begin too late and end too soon. There is hardly anything on how and why Zaheer as a privileged young man turned to Communism in the first place. And, regrettably if understandably, there is nothing on the events after 1947 either, when the Communist Party of India sent Zaheer out to Pakistan as the Secretary-General of the Communist Party of Pakistan to bring about a revolution in that new-born country. After Zaheer and Faiz Ahmad Faiz met one night with a disgruntled Major-General who himself was looking "left and right" for support to stage a *coup*, they were all promptly nabbed and tried for treason in what came to be known as the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case. Zaheer spent four and a half years in jail, using the period to write this book, and was released only on the condition that he will then return to India, which Nehru graciously let him do. Zaheer's strange and stirring life-story, from its *baba log* beginnings to a trajectory of high radical endeavour, sustained throughout by (among other things) his love of literature in four or five languages including Persian and French, still awaits the right biographer.

Who could well be someone like Priyamvada Gopal, who in her book *Literary Radicalism in India* writes with lucidity and verve of the life and works of four other Progressive writers, two women and two men, who were all comrades and colleagues of Sajjad Zaheer: Rashid Jahan, Ismat Chughtai, Manto, and Khwaja Ahmad Abbas. Gopal is young and keen and theoretically sophisticated, reads Urdu literature mainly in devanagari (which may well be the mainstream scholarly practice now), and is apparently unglamoured by the mythology surrounding the canonical Progressive writers, whom she treats with sympathy and enthusiasm but without piety.

Thus, she cites some inconvenient statements by her chosen writers, such as Ismat Chughtai's observation that "The working class has been used [by some armchair Progressives] in much the same way as the prostitute is used," or Manto's essay titled *Taraqqi Pasand Socha Nahin Karte* (Progressives Seldom Think), she boldly takes on hallowed authorities such as Tharu and Lalita, and she proceeds to make some sturdy discriminations of her own. Her choice of texts may be highly selective and her canvas modestly and manageably small, but through her focus on concerns such as "habitus" and the "body," and her mixing together of Urdu writers with Indian-English writers, she seeks to blur what she calls the "reigning schematics" of postcolonial studies.

At one point, Gopal translates what Manto calls simply "an unnamed pleasure" into "precognitive and ontological" enjoyment, adding that "the erotic is inescapably ideological." Well, Sajjad Zaheer and Rashid Jahan had both exploited precisely that ideological potential in that explosive pioneering Progressive work in Urdu, *Angarey* (1932), but at Gopal's hands, Rashid Jahan (who contributed two pieces) gets rather more credit than Sajjad Zaheer (who contributed five pieces and was the editor) – in accordance, of course, with another reigning schematics.■

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An Enduring Classic

M. Asaduddin

UMRAO JAN ADA
By Mirza Muhammad Hadi Ruswa. Translated by Khushwant Singh and M.A. Husaini.
Orient Paperbacks, Delhi, 2005, pp.232, Rs. 175.00

This is a new edition of the English translation of this Urdu classic (1900) which was first published in 1970 under the series. 'UNESCO Collection of Representative Works', and later reprinted by Disha Books. Umrao Jan has almost become a figure of folklore after Ruswa immortalized her in his novel, *Umrao Jan Ada* which by now has several celluloid versions of it produced both in India and Pakistan. Arguably, this is the first Urdu novel as we understand the genre, despite Qurratulain Hyder's claim to the contrary, sharing with many other first novels in different Indian languages the common feature of a female protagonist. Allegedly modelled on a real life character and, again allegedly, on G.W.M. Reynold's *Rosa Lambert* the novel has remained popular ever since its publication more than a century ago. Ruswa successfully translated quite a few novels from English into Urdu, including at least three by Marie Corelli, before writing this novel. He was a self-conscious artist who set out deliberately to write narrative prose works which scrupulously shunned the world of fantasy and enchantment popularized by the dastan tradition and the overt didacticism of some of his contemporaries.

Set in the mid-nineteenth century, it is written as a first person narrative of an accomplished courtesan of Lucknow. Nine year old Ameeran, a middle-class Muslim girl of Faizabad, led a carefree life until the day a neighbour of the family, Dilawar Khan, abducts her to settle scores with her father (whose testimony in a court case once sent him to prison). Though he plans to kill her, his accomplice proposes instead taking her to Lucknow and selling her. Ameeran is taken to Lucknow and sold to Madame Khanum, the keeper of a high-class brothel. But to the child, whom Khanum promptly renames Umrao and who understands nothing of the brothel's mercenary culture, it seems a magical place. 'The days and nights were filled with dancing and singing, shows and concerts, and fairs and picnics in pleasure gardens. Khanum's house appeared like paradise to us.'

Soon begins her schooling in music, dance, and poetry. As she grows up she slowly imbibes the mores of the whorehouse, tutored by the senior courtesans who acquaint her with the rites of passage. Her age of innocence comes to an end when she is formally "deflowered" by Rashid Ali alias Rakkhan Mia (though it was Gauhar Mirza, Umrao's childhood friend, who was the first to pluck the flower). But contrary to the traditional image of prostitutes as victims of society, here one gets the image of women who are empowered to a remarkable degree: "When they rose from their couches, people praised Allah for their beauty; when they walked people spread a carpet of admiring glances at their feet." A courtesan's attitude to her admirers and to the larger world was also determined by her location in the twilight zone of the society where people offered her adulation but not respect. Hence, the urge to avenge herself on the society by enslaving men. Umrao Jan says the courtesans "treat their admirers like slaves at their beck and call. Heavens could fall but their word could not be trifled with... The courtesans were like goddesses at whose altar worshippers brought themselves as offering for sacrifice. And like goddesses they treated everything with haughty disdain. Human lives were of no consequence to them..."

Though it is Umrao's life which is the pivot around which most of the incidents in the novel revolve, Ruswa has woven into its texture the entire socio-cultural life of Lucknow and, to a lesser extent, vignettes of life in smaller towns such as Kanpur and Faizabad. The urbane Nawab Sultan Sahib, the dashing Nawab Chabban, the loyalist Raja, the small-town parvenu Rashid Ali alias Rakkhan Mia, the wily Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan, the highway robber Faiz Ali, the sanctimonious lawyer's attorney Akbar Ali Khan, the Maulvi Sahib who teaches Umrao and has been in love with Husaini for years, the old Nawab who is the butt of Bismillah Jan's ridicule—all converge on Khanum's house of ill repute. They offer different perspectives which help the reader look at society from different angles. Furthermore, Ruswa's genial, sometimes wry, humour makes even the most ordinary characters endearing. For instance, the feckless, dimwitted imam of the mosque in Kanpur whom Umrao Jan teases constantly even though she needs his help. Using fine brushstrokes Ruswa has immortalized this otherwise banal character. The prostitutes, though brought up in the same mould, taught by the same set of teachers and practising the same skills, have their own special traits. Bega Jan excels in music, Khurshid in dancing. Umrao Jan excels in both, besides being an accomplished poet. Bismillah Jan's sole asset is her body. Khanum Jan suits her role perfectly; she is every inch the powerful mistress of a famed brothel, unmatched in her seduction and cunning. Recent studies of the life and times of courtesans in Lucknow by Violette Graff and Veena Oldenburg confirm that the mores, manners and professional ethics of courtesans, and the role they played in the society of that time as depicted in the novel, are generally correct and authentic. The Mutiny of 1857 which occurs in the second half of the novel and the enormous changes brought about by this cataclysmic event have not been described directly, only suggested through its effects on the fate of the characters and on social life. The presence of some historical personalities, such as Bahu Begam, Begam Malika Kishvar, Nawab Vajid Ali Shah, Prince Mirza Sikandar Hashmat, and Prince Mirza Birjis Qadr, lends a special poignancy to the narrative. Ruswa integrates history and fiction and weaves the destiny of his characters in a way that creates an enduring work of literature.

Umrao Jan Ada also presents a more complex and sophisticated portrayal of human character and of good and evil. Whereas in the earlier works of Urdu prose fiction characters were depicted in black and white terms without any shades of grey, this novel offers much more. Through the vicissitudes of her life Umrao acquires a deep knowledge of human nature and this brings her wisdom and peace: "Personally, I think that no one is wholly bad, and there is some good to be found in everyone. You have probably heard it said about the thieves of the past that if you make a friend of them, then you will always get along very well. Without some element of goodness, life would be impossible." Similarly, her perception of virtue and sin is subtler. Though she makes ritual obeisance to the tenets of religion and regrets that she is living in sin, these seem to be mere rhetorical flourishes. Her more complex understanding of moral issues comes out in several places through her defence of her own way of life. When the narrator asks her what punishment she anticipates for her sinful existence which has required hurting many hearts, she says: "There should not be any. In the way that I harmed hearts there was also much pleasure, and the pleasure makes up for the pain".

The translators make it clear in the preface that in the absence of a definitive edition of the text, they took help from four versions of the original, and obviously, such a task would involve some pruning and reordering of material for which one cannot find fault with them. The actual translation by Khushwant Singh and Husaini endeavours to retain the flavour of the original. Even so, I find their omission of the opening mushaira scene regrettable, as it sets the tone of this enduring classic. When the English version was published for the first time it was severely criticized for what the reviewers called its 'stilted' and 'Victorian' English, a criticism that has stuck till today. But I have a slightly different view. In their efforts to remain closer to the original the translators have retained culturally specific terms, images, idioms and proverbs and in doing so they have been able to retain the spirit of the original. (This cannot be said about the other and more recent version in English rendered by David Matthews which is marred by quite a few misreadings). They have resisted the temptation to make their English look trendy and crisp at the cost of sacrificing the cultural content, which may have occasionally hampered readability. To expect that *Umrao Jan Ada* should read in English like *Memoirs of a Geisha* is to ignore both the process and objective of literary translation as understood in contemporary times.■

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A Chronicle of Love and Loss

Rizwan Husain

MY FELLOW TRAVELLER: A TRANSLATION OF HUMSAFAR
By Hameeda Akhtar Husain Raipuri. Translated by Amina Azfar
Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2006, pp. 384, Rs. 495.00

Only there is no room,
just the teasing void of memory.
- Azar Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran*

Pen and housewife, they say, do not mix well in macho cultures. Caring, loving, warm, and compassionate by nature, Hameeda must have always been encouraged all along to remain true only to the prescribed role of South Asian womanhood, a role of fulfilling domesticity. Barring the Maulvi, no one in her life – not even her husband – did ever encourage her to wield the pen. In fact, a deconstructive reading of the narrative may reveal how thoroughly she was *psyched* out of any such ambition by no less a person than Akhtar himself.

My Fellow Traveller is an offbeat memoir, a debut offering which has morphed Hameeda, a housewife-turned-writer, into an instant celebrity. No honed language, no philosophical snippets, no overarching story, and yet it is a most compelling read. What accounts for much of its breakout popularity is its confiding, subdued narrative, which rarely breaks its leash.

What is more, it is a book of overly peculiar origins: because, as we know, its Urdu version, *Humsafar*, was the author's first-ever work, written in the *seventh* decade of her life, and that too in a state of emotional collapse, soon after her husband's death. Rare are the writers who begin so late; and rarer are they who can transmute a personal misfortune into an enabling experience.

But why did Hameeda take such an awfully long time to discover her potential for writing? Was it merely a chance discovery at the age of 72, when her cosy world suddenly collapsed, leaving her with few heavens in her life? Or, had she secreted it on purpose till then? Being the daughter of a popular novelist, Zafar Omar, the wife of a well-known literary intellectual, Akhtar Husain Raipuri, and a longtime protégée of Baba-e-Urdu, Maulvi Abdul Haque, she was perhaps quite well attuned for it. But writing felt just out of reach till she became 72. Why?

Pen and housewife, they say, do not mix well in macho cultures. Caring, loving, warm, and compassionate by nature, Hameeda must have always been encouraged all along to remain true only to the prescribed role of South Asian womanhood, a role of fulfilling domesticity. Barring the Maulvi, no one in her life – not even her husband – did ever encourage her to wield the pen. In fact, a deconstructive reading of the narrative may reveal how thoroughly she was *psyched* out of any such ambition by no less a person than Akhtar himself. For, on recalling her first girlish brush with Akhtar, her future husband, whose 'Nigar' story *'Zaban-e-bezabani'* (The Tongue of Speechlessness) she had already read and secretly admired, Hameeda had this to say with such grave irony:

> Little did I know that this story would change my life in such a way that I would spend the rest of it under that very same *banyan tree.* That this tall tree would always grow taller and more verdant, *while I would remain on the ground beneath it, watching it with my face raised towards its crown.* (p. 10, emphasis is mine)

It may be noted, however, that Hameeda, like many a romantic Muslim teenager in the Aligarh of the 1930s, was quite susceptible to the amorous appeal of a literary reputation: it took just a piece of literature – in her case a short story—to connect her with the man of her dreams. Such secret romancing, often one-sided, with renowned youthful literary personages of the time, say with a Majaz or a Jan Nisar Akhtar, was not an uncommon amusement in those days.

Thus, succumbing as if to Stockholm syndrome, Hameeda fell madly in love with Akhtar, holding him all the time in great awe. Then how could she dare rank equal with him, let alone outrank him? Writing, therefore, must have been a forbidden fruit for her. But in the days immediately after Akhtar's death, this devoted, ruffled-bloused housewife seemed to have been seized by a compelling urge to narrate. In fact, what she had gained in this moment of terminal loss was a sudden burst of long suppressed creativity. However, with memory bursting at the seams, she felt totally overwhelmed by an unstoppable succession of freeze-frames, clicking by rapidly, painfully, vividly. 'What now?' was the question she was faced with. *Pen it down*, advised Jamil Jalibi, a long-time family friend. .

But writing was as yet a totally untried ball game for her. How could she do it? After a while, however, something shifted. Her spirits buoyed her back to the surface. Perhaps she was too much of a cerebral to grieve for long. And as she started writing, she made a strange discovery: she felt better, different, dignified. Soon she realized that she wouldn't, may be couldn't, stop writing. Writing became a welcome diversion from all that she had on her mind in those days. And as Salman Rushdie would say, "In the end was the *word*."

My Fellow Traveller comprises two main strains in its central narative: one, an elegiac send-off, a memorial tribute, to the past which she had shared with Akhtar; and two, a lyrical celebration of the conjugal bliss between the two. Around this narrative is a lush and layered autobiographical evocation of some pivotal men and women – a star-packed roster – like Gandhi, Nehru, G.B. Panth, Sarojini Naido, Khalida Adib Khanum, etc., who loomed gigantic in the subcontinent's cultural memory. What is more, a whisper-quick subtext also keeps popping up as an authorial voice, as if in direct communication with her inspiring mentor, 'Jamil Bhai'. (One really wonders why these subtextual interjections have not been put in *italics*).

The central character in *My Fellow Traveller* is the stiff, mostly off-putting, presence of Akhtar, who is like a Cheshire cat that keeps on appearing and disappearing unexpectedly. But the Akhtar who emerges from Hameeda's memory is a young man who wrote highbrow fiction, who was something of a brash temperament, with wild and irreverent responses, sporting idiosyncratic clothes and six-inch long sideburns. In one of the relatively rare intimate passages in the book, he is being described thus: *'After I had collected a fistful of of flowers and had just placed my foot on the bottom step of the staircase to go upstairs, I came face to face with 'that boy,' who was coming down. I stared at him with astonishment Yes, it was the same person, and he sported the basketful of hair, long sideburns, thick lips, and a Russian style shirt …'.* The oddities of Akhtar's family background have been noted in Hameeda's narrative which thrills the reader to discover his Hindu connection, his experiences of a broken home, and his increasing distancing from his father and siblings. The narrative also bristles with examples of his literary and ideological tiffs with his contemporaries. In those days Neeli Chatri, her Aligarh home, was not just a house, but a small neighbourhood of budding left intellectuals. Akhtar always thought of himself as one of them, but always with a difference. Because of this, and also because of his later-life opulence perhaps, he became the target of much flak from most of them. Even his memoir, *Gard-e-Rah*, scripted at the fag end of his life, when he had become almost blind, couldn't turn the tide of such critiquing. History may well judge that he was one of the most gifted Urdu intellectuals of his generation, but it is hard to argue that he really put his talents to good use.

Then much later, when he was living in quiet retirement in Pakistan, he was awarded the *Sitara-e-Imtiaz* by the then government of Pakistan. Regarding this, Hameeda writes:

'Our sons were telling their father, "You are surely not going to accept an award from the Martial Law government," Akhtar replied with a laugh, "Why do you forget these two points: A government, a country, and its people are different entities. *I neither asked for this award nor will I refuse it*",'

(p. 132, emphasis is mine)

Another overmastering identity in the narrative is that of Baba-e-Urdu Maulvi Abdul Huq. A man of traditional views and settled habits, he was never out of step with the new age. His colourful, delightfully idiosyncratic, personality was in sharp contrast to the monochrome persona of Akhtar, who was collaborating in the making of the famous 'English-Urdu' dictionary. But why didn't the Maulvi credit Akhtar for his share of the 'hard work' in the project? However, if it was a breach of trust between the two, why didn't Akhtar protest? The narrative keeps an ominous silence over this question.

The hidden core of the book features the author herself, a personality that turns out to be a 'doer', a performing self. Though a quiet, lifetime sidekick to her husband, she never tried to be out front. She gratefully recognized Akhtar's one-line appreciation of her lifelong love and hard work to him:

'With one sentence in his memoir, *Gard-e-Rah*, he paid me back for all the hard work and love that I had lavished on him:

> *Hameeda Begum is my wife, and all though all my life, I was like a flying kite—remote and distant—she neither let go of the kite string, nor allowed a severance.*

(p. 373)

However, after long years of anonymous toil helping her husband turn into a literary legend, she now has earned her place in the spotlight. She deserves it.■

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In Quest of One's Roots

B. Mangalam

THE SURAGI TREE
By Prabhakar Acharya
MapinLit, Ahmedabad, 2006, pp. 452, Rs.395.00

Prabhakar Acharya's *The Suragi Tree* is a delightful novel. The 400 plus narrative is surprisingly a quick, absorbing read: racy, but relaxed, spanning over six decades but time-warped, tale of a solitary man but peopled with an enormous number of characters; each one vivacious and memorable, the intertwining of a rural landscape with a distinct community orientation and the metropolitan anonymity that seeks to strike up a bond with strangers, the creative turmoil of a writer who writes brilliantly but quotes from good old Englisih canonical writers on every third page — these are some of the defining elements of this novel which hold the reader's attention rather consistently till the end.

The novel's absorbing plot, a quality of earnestness and simplicity in its narration, its relaxed and relaxing pace, its suave control over academic scholarship and village life that interpenetrate with easy familiarity in the narrative are simply breathtaking. This is easily the most well written first novel by a writer in recent times. What is more remarkable is the fact that Acharya turned to writing fiction after retiring as Head of the Department of English, from a college in Mumbai. The novel shows remarkable creative energy that manages to remain unblunted by the retired English Professor's profuse indebtedness to his profession. Some chapters read like veritable lectures with generous quotes from all the cannonical British writers: Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Herbert, Marvel, Chesterton, Spender, Frost, Milton, Yeats, Eliot and others. There is an earnest debate on whom the Indian writer addresses while writing in English. The protagonist Sudhakar Rao teaches English in a college in Mumbai. Hence, classroom lectures spill over and spice up the narrative especially as the young lecturer dates his women students, watches movies with them, scours the city for eateries to take them for lunch and loses his job over one of them. But these misadventures are firmly textured within a cultural context that reverberates with vivid memories of his childhood in Nampalli, a serene village in Karnataka, his brahminical upbringing, an intense bond with his uncle whom he loves, idolizes, emulates, deserts and agonizes over.

Sudhakar Rao's conflict with his physician father who wants him to study biology while Sudhakar sits dreaming under the Suragi tree, composing poems and stories is laced with an angst, pathos and reverential emotional distancing that is poignant and heartrending. This is an experience, perhaps, many readers who have struggled to pursue literature in a society going berserk over FITJEE, Akash, Narayana, CAT coaching would identify with. The novel puts across a positive need to preserve a link with one's past, to cherish one's childhood bond with nature and community even while reckoning with the inevitable growing out of its protective, restrictive fold. The novel's simple structure of sin and expiation, of crime and punishment is transcended by a narrative intelligence that is aware of the poignance and restriction of having to live with "frayed and inadequately severed relationships" with one's family, village workplace, relationships and nature.

Sudhakar Rao shares his birthday with Yeats. He makes much of this, venerating Yeats's poetry, his passion for Maud Gonne and his "courage to make a fool of himself in love". Sudhakar's love for Dahshi, his student half his age, however is characterized not by Yeatsian "courage" but by a reticent, detached, passive acceptance of others' wilful intervention over the relationship.

Sudhakar's growing solitude, his physical exile from his hometown is juxtaposed with his increasing popularity among children of his apartment complex some of whom bless him with unconditional love, nurturing him during illness and inspiring him to new creative heights. The novel teems with memorable characters: Sudhakar's mother (bereft, for a change, of smothering motherliness), his cousins, his worldlywise, "successful" younger brother, his group of friends at Nampalli and Udupi, especially little Ramu who protects his wayward mother in her old age and of course Dakshi.

The novel tries to place the narration within English literature literary criticism of the modernist phase. But the novel's real success lies in the fact that it manages to transcend its conscious indebtedness to modernist poets and reaches out to postmodernist sensibility without compromising on a lucid, rivetting narrative that retains the charm of old world storytelling.

MapinLit's production is flawless and one hopes its marketing is equally professional. This novel is a must-read for this decade of readers bombarded by novels rooted in plagiraization and internet culture. Sudhakar Rao's intense bond with the Suragi tree, the myths he believes in and the mystical experiences he encounters in the last section of the novel transports the reader to a world that has been shut out from fiction in recent decades. The novelist's quest for reaching out to his roots is sure to make the uprooted reader appreciate the need for a value-loaded past and turn the others misty-eyed about one's fragile bond with memories of childhood and a vanishing landscape.■

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Scattered Bright And Shining

Gillian Wright

SLIVERS OF A MIRROR: GLIMPSES OF THE GHAZAL
By Shama Futehally
MapinLit, Ahmedabad, 2006, pp. 143, price not stated.

In Satyajit Ray's film *Shatranj ke Khilari* there is a memorable scene when Colonel Sleeman is confronted by Urdu poetry. His assistant is reciting a poem composed by Wajid Ali Shah.

"Is that all?" asks Sleeman in disbelief when the poem ends after a few couplets.

"Yes, Sir."

"And what does it mean?" he inquires in a broad Scots accent, tapping the end of his cigar.

His assistant translates the elliptical Persianate verses.

"And is that considered good poetry?" asks Sleeman, his intonation revealing that he doesn't think it is.

"It doesn't translate well, sir," concludes the assistant.

In a way Urdu poetry has become, rather like the Mahatma, an icon of modern India. Every child learns about Gandhiji in school, but they rarely imbibe his principles. Urdu is universally referred to as a "sweet language" but few outside the Muslim community will exert themselves to learn it. The situation sometimes is not dissimilar to that of Ustad Bismillah Khan who once, after getting through a Delhi concert with an appalling sound system and a musically ignorant audience, looked down at the people seated before him (I was one of them) and appealed , "*Thora sa sangeet sikhiye.*"

The world has changed in many ways since the time of the great masters of the Urdu ghazal. Unfortunately the generation is passing away that was brought up in the culture which produced them. Families that would delight in the wit, humour and brilliance of Urdu poetry have sent their children to English medium schools which inhibit the reading of Indian languages. The dumbing down and homogenization of modern urban culture also fills our heads with noise and discourages reflection

So it is natural that even though the ghazal is popular, readers have problems with the vocabulary and with the meaning of the verses themselves. For many the Urdu script is also as insuperable a barrier as the Himalyas. And then there is the point raised by Sleeman's assistant—it doesn't translate easily.

In this modern metro-India *Slivers of a Mirror* could be a disastrous title. "Sliver" is a little used word and it sits very uncomfortably on the cover of the book, as if to warn that this is yet another failed attempt to bring Urdu poetry into English. These days, when people are always on the look-out for quick answers, the publishers might have been better advised to have a cartoon of a mushaira on the cover and call the book, *The Ghazal for Dummies*.

Something should be done to bring *Slivers of A Mirror* to a mass audience because it deserves to be read as widely as possible. Shama Futehally's masterly introduction covers the history, language and form of the ghazal. Both novices and all who would like to refresh their memories will delight in her profound understanding of the subject and the brevity, clarity and simplicity with which she presents it.

Inside the book is beautifully designed with Urdu poems side by side with her English translations and interleaved by a single word reproduced in silver grey to fill a whole page. The ghazal is first and foremost an oral poem, to be recited, but these pages of single words remind us of the immense beauty of the Urdu nastalliq script and that each word has a thousand connotations—khamoshi (silence), khar (a thorn), shikasta (defeated), dil (heart) or ishq (love).

With the thorough and conscientious mind of a true teacher, Shama Futehally also provides thumbnail sketches of each of her poets and the poems in the Hindi script, as well as each Hindi letter of the alphabet beside its Urdu equivalent, and a useful bibliography.

Shama's introduction makes it clear why the ghazal is so difficult to translate. Quite simply, there is a huge linguistic and cultural gap to be crossed and Shama Futehally admits that it is reasonable to ask why one should attempt translation at all. Her answer is that although one cannot produce the totality of a poem, one can imitate *some* of its elements. As she points out, the ghazal largely relies on rhythm, metre and sounds. As the whole point of the couplets is rhyme and since those rhymes cannot be reproduced, she has used "such rhyme patterns as presented themselves, as well as repetition, alliteration and differing fretworks in the metre."

Shama has selected her favourites of some of the most famous ghazals of Urdu literature. She includes Wali, one of the first Urdu poets, who though using Deccani Urdu from the south, lived for many years in Gujarat and is buried in Ahmadabad, as well as the masters of the 18th century Delhi—the satirist Sauda, Mir Taqi Mir and the Sufi, Khwaja Mir Dard. Another mystic included is Siraj Aurangabadi who renounced the world completely in his later years. Then there are the rivals from the 19th century, Zauq and Ghalib, the sensuous Momin and the fun-loving Insha. Iqbal, Hali and Akbar Allahabadi are included, as are poets from the twentieth century Firaq, Faiz and Sahir Ludhianvi.

If any verse in the selected ghazals failed to appeal to her, she left them out. This is her personal collection, the poems "like slivers of a very personal mirror, scattered, but bright and shining"—that "sliver" word again, she was obviously looking for an alternative to "pieces".

The Mirror in Urdu and Persian poetry has many connotations. It is the human heart, made by God, which if kept well polished will reflect the glory of the Divine. To quote her translation of Iqbal,

Don't enfold
or wrap or hold
this glass of your
creating. It is a mirror
meant to break—
the human heart you've made—
each sliver dear
to the Mirror-maker.

Or Mir Taqi Mir,

Your oneness is
a flaming thing
no double
will it brook

Into that dazzling
Singleness
what mirror dares
to look?

The Sufi poets, and those who wrote of both divine and physical love, remind us of the search for God and the universality of love. To quote Mir,

What Kaaba now?
Which sacred site? What
shrine must we revere?

Those living in
the street of love
make their salaams from here.

As I read the ghazals and her translations, I was impressed by how much meaning Shama Futehally has managed to put into so few words, and was struck by the contrast between what she had written and the original Urdu. This made me consider the Urdu more carefully. So as a reader I gained doubly from this volume.

Very sadly, before this book was published, Shama Futehully passed away, wiped from the slate of the world by her Creator. She was a fine scholar and a great teacher, as this book reveals. Her talent and personality were unique, never to be repeated. Ghalib, in one of her chosen ghazals, wrote this complaint against God on his own behalf, but we could recite it in the memory of all talented and good people like Shama who leave us too soon.■

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Aftermath of An Abortion

Shohini Ghosh

SHOOTING WATER: A MOTHER-DAUGHTER JOURNEY & THE MAKING OF A FILM
By Devyani Saltzman. Afterword by Deepa Mehta.
Penguin Books, India, 2006, pp. 256, Rs. 295.00

Shooting Water is Devyani Saltzman's memoirs about her experiences during the shooting of her mother Deepa Mehta's film *Water*. The title is a bit misleading because the book is not so much about the shooting of the film (even though it is also about that) but about her struggle to grow up in two worlds after the divorce of her parents. Her relationship with her mother becomes perennially haunted by her decision to live with her father. Devyani, named after the character played by Suchitra Sen in Asit Sen's *Mamta*, comes to India to work on her mother's production where, apart from gaining work experience she hopes to heal her troubled relationship with her mother under the grim shadow of her childhood choice.

Devyani's trip to Varanasi as an assistant in her mother's crew plunges her directly in the middle of the chaos that gets unleashed when Hindutva groups go on a rampage against the shooting of *Water* and she falls in love with a crew member who is already in a relationship. The twin crises make her encounter with India emotionally overwhelming. The book therefore deals with two journeys, a personal one and that of the film *Water*. I must confess at the outset that the personal journey failed to hold either my interest or patience. To be fair, there are some moving passages but they are overtaken by a preoccupation with coming-of-age angst and an obsession with documenting the banality of it. Unfortunately, the least explored relationship in the book is the one with her mother. Devyani's time in Varanasi is so taken up by her unrequited love for the crew member that it displaces her engagement with both her mother and the film. In fact, it even displaces any ethical dilemmas that such a 'kiss-and-tell' confessional might entail given that the 'frank account' clearly violates the consent of several people involved. The journey about the making of the film is comparatively more interesting even though those familiar with the controversy are unlikely to make too many new discoveries.

Water was meant to be Deepa Mehta's third film in the elements trilogy after *Fire* and *Earth*. Mehta started shooting for the film in January 2000 after the film was cleared by the I&B Ministry under the NDA coalition. The female leads were to be played by Shabana Azmi and Nandita Das both of whom had shaved their heads in order to play the roles of the widows of Varanasi. However, word got around that the film was "anti-Hindu" provoking the usual suspects to agitate. Led by the BJP, VHP, Shiv Sena and the obscure *Kashi Sanskriti Raksha Sangharsh Samiti* (probably formed only for this purpose) unruly mobs vandalized the sets and held demonstrations in the city. The number of protesters was not large and the man who tried to commit suicide turned out to be a fake. But using the furore as an excuse, the UP government stopped the shooting of the film. As millions of dollars wasted away, the country witnessed the ruling coalition's inability to rein in their own foot soldiers. The script travelled back to the I&B ministry but nothing really happened. Several non-BJP ruled states offered protection and invited the filmmaker to shoot in their states. For reasons that are still unclear, Mehta never took up their offers. A couple of years later, the film was shot and completed in Sri Lanka (masquerading as Varanasi) but with an entirely different cast and crew.

Devyani's narrative is unable to do justice to this gripping and complex drama. Her descriptions are broad and frequently naïve. 'Who is the RSS?" she asks her mother. "They are the cultural wing of the ruling BJP" her mother replies. Now, I am sure Deepa Mehta knows only too well who the RSS is but clearly Devyani wasn't paying attention. When the mob shouts "Deepa Mehta Murdabad, Water film Murdabad" Devyani wants to know what it means. Someone translates, "They say they want the film dead. They want Deepa dead". Clearly, she wasn't paying attention here either.

Shooting Water is Devyani Saltzman's memoirs about her experiences during the shooting of her mother Deepa Mehta's film *Water*. The title is a bit misleading because the book is not so much about the shooting of the film (even though it is also about that) but about her struggle to grow up in two worlds after the divorce of her parents. Her relationship with her mother becomes perennially haunted by her decision to live with her father.

But what is perhaps most disconcerting is that the entire account ignores the widespread condemnation that the actions of the Sangh Parivar received. Both *Fire* and *Water* had people from all over the country walk the streets in support of Deepa Mehta. None of this gets mentioned in the book consequently, Hindu nationalism and fanaticism appear as both dominant but and unchallenged. There was enough time between her arrival in Varanasi and her writing of the book to do some reasonable research. A more complex understanding of a complex country may have transformed the quality of the book and made it more readable.

However, the book offers one piece of information that most people may not know and that is, Deepa Mehta's attempt to negotiate a solution directly with the RSS. She met with RSS supremo K. Sudershan, who already had on his table a bound volume of her script! During this meeting, he advised Deepa to work on the script with Seshadri Chari, then editor of *The Organizer* to remove passages that were offensive to the Parivar. After several deletions, the RSS finally approved the script or so it seemed. As she was leaving the office, happy that all problems had been ironed out, Chari said, "Deepa keep this in mind. A good general knows when to retreat". Sure enough, the agitation restarts and the UP government stops the shooting of the film. The crew has to finally pack up and leave never to return again.

It is understandable that Mehta would want to replace Varanasi with Sri Lanka as it gave her much greater security and peace of mind to make the film. But replacing the original cast has still not been clearly understood by many who have followed the making of the film. Devyani offers justifications that frankly do not wash. She writes that Nandita was dropped because she no longer "possessed the innocence" needed to play the younger widow and lacked "the age and experience" to play the older widow. Considering at one time, Mehta had offered her both roles to choose from, this reasoning appears weak. According to Devyani, Shabana was dropped because "her high profile" would "endanger the secrecy that Sri Lanka offered…." This is followed by a revelation that cracks the puzzle somewhat. The Producer, who later dropped out, had made his support conditional upon Shabana being excluded from the project and had actually got Deepa to sign a bond to this effect. As people close to the industry will know, casting considerations are not just professional but also a matter of economics and politics.

But worse justice is done to poor Akshay Kumar whom Devvyani chooses to ignore completely. Akshay Kumar had publicly defended *Water* saying that he was a believing Hindu and he would not have agreed to work in the film were it denigrating the religion. Having read the script, he said, he was convinced it was an important film to make. Akshay Kumar never made it back to the cast. He was replaced by current heartthrob John Abraham who had been spotted on TV by Devyani's grandmother! The *Asian Age* of February 10, 2000 had reported that in the aftermath of the Hindutva protests, Akshay Kumar had said in a Press Conference "it is sad I could not work in this film." To which Deepa Mehta had interrupted him saying, "What do you mean you could not? You are still in the film. We haven't given up." In hindsight, Akshay Kumar's guileless slip was prophetic.■

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From the Visual to the Word

Paromita Chakravarti

WATER: A NOVEL BASED ON THE FILM BY DEEPA MEHTA
By Bapsi Sidhwa
Penguin/Viking: New Delhi, 2006, pp.201, Rs. 325.00

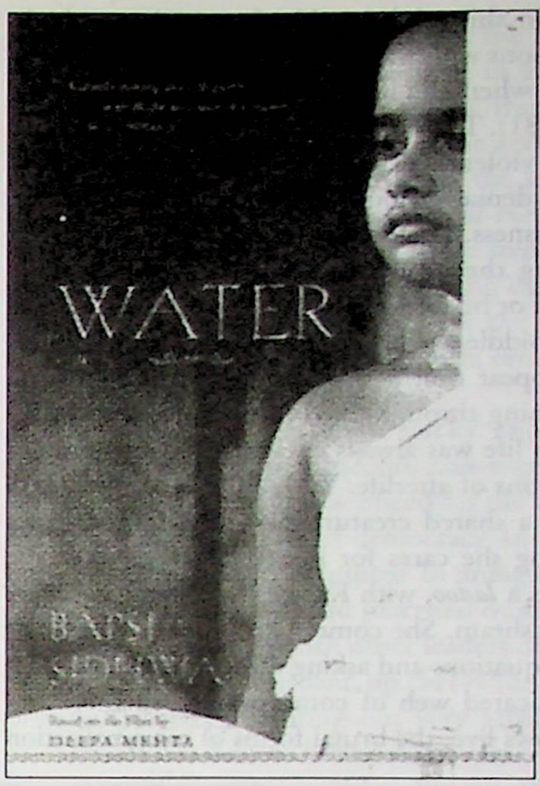
Bapsi Sidhwa's *Water* is an unusual work which translates Deepa Mehta's film "Water" into a novel. It renders an audio-visual experience into words, significantly reversing the commoner trend of turning novels into films and problematizing the usually assumed authority and "originality" of the literary text over the "adapted" cinematic version. Here the book adapts the film. As such, Mehta, the screenplay and dialogue writer remains a crucial contributor to the project. This is a new phase in the collaborative work that Mehta and Sidhwa started with Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man* being turned into Mehta's film, "Earth".

Water's status as a commissioned, promotional enterprise for the film further complicates our reading of the novel. For Sidhwa, it was difficult, as she admits in her Acknowledgements, to churn out a novel in three months: "I had never written within the confines of a structured story before, or the constraint of time." Some of this strain shows. Besides, what is the function of the novel? Is it meant to memorialize the film experience in viewers' minds as the written versions of plays did in Shakespeare's England or books of song lyrics did in early twentieth century India when cassettes were not easily available? But in this day of easily accessible DVDs this seems redundant. Perhaps the novel is meant to reinforce or supplement the film in some way or even to provide explanations and fill out the narrative for an audience who might not be familiar with the context and the setting. At any rate Sidhwa's stature as a novelist will certainly lend its weight to the film. In countries like India, where the film has not been released, in deference to the Hindu right wing groups which had stopped the shooting of "Water" five years ago, the novel will stand in for the film.

However, reading the novel as someone who has not seen the film, one is still struck by its derivative feel. It is full of scenes which are obviously cinematic and appear to be transcribed directly from the film. But it is not so much a case of using Mehta's film as being generically "*filmi*". For instance, Narayan, the Gandhian idealist hero appears out of nowhere, heroically recovers the heroine's runaway pet and wins its mistress' eternal love and gratitude. Narayan's home with its gramophone and French windows, the image of Narayan and his friend playing the flute on the river bank, Kalyani accidentally pouring water on Narayan's head from the rooftop as he wanders lovelorn on the streets by her house are images powerfully reminiscent of nineteenth century period films. The final scene with Shakunatala, the widow, running with Chuiya, the child-protagonist alongside a fast moving train and a last minute rescue by the hero from the train is unmistakably Bollywoodesque. It is difficult to say whether or to what extent these allusions to cinematic conventions are self conscious on the part of Sidhwa or Mehta.

The setting of Rawalpur is a thinly disguised version of early twentieth century Benaras which appears in the novel through ever receding cinematic frames. The busy ghats, narrow alleys, the boats on the river at night with *thumris* ringing out are images familiarized to us by Satyajit Ray in *Aparajito* and *Joy Baba Felunath* (Chuiya's run to the ghats to fetch water as Bua lies dying and the pot tumbling down the steps quotes *Aparajito*) and more recently by Rituparno Ghosh in *Chokher Bali* (a film which focuses on the figure of the widow who leaves for Benaras) and reiterated through mainstream films such as *Benaras*. Although Sidhwa's descriptions of the city are vibrant they remain mediated. Even history is flattened out through hackneyed images. The figure of Gandhi appears at a distance, fixed through iconic gestures, waving to the masses from railway carriages, an image frozen by Attenborough's *Gandhi*.

The story though dramatic fails to have any impact. The radical romance



of Kalyani and Narayan, the powerful pivot of the narrative, gets diluted by the tired, cliché-ridden language in which it is framed. Reunited with her lover under harrowing circumstances Kalyani is described sentimentally: "She looked radiant, content; and as a bud touched by the sun blooms, she flowered in the caress of his gaze" (p.168).

While Sidhwa depends extensively on images in her narrative, she often doubts their power to convey meaning. Anxious sentences such as "With these silent gestures, she let Narayan know that he had her blessing..." (p.174-5) follow expressive visual descriptions. Perhaps this articulates an uncertainty about the novelist's role as a translator of Mehta's film images into words. Consequently the novel becomes uncharacteristically verbose, even banal. The heavily adjectivized language of Kalyani's despair, when she feels she has lost Narayan, dilutes the bleakness of the moment:

> "...the destructive potential of that horrific instant was still filtering in, weighing her down with the realization of all that she had lost and the precarious position she was in." (p.175)

The second-hand feel of the narrative mediated through familiar images and tired phrases is enhanced by Sidhwa's acknowledged debts to Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay's *Pather Panchali* which she draws upon to create Chuiya's pastoral girlhood experiences and to an edited volume *Widows in India* for "the customs and traditions governing the treatment of widows in Indian society". While Sidhwa's own understanding of child psychology, so brilliantly demonstrated through her portrayal of the girl-narrator Lenny in *Ice-candy Man*, blends unobtrusively with Bibhutibhushan's poignant characterization of Durga in *Pather Panchali*, the historical information often rings false. Narayan tells his mother, "Raja Rammohan Roy says widows should get remarried" (p.138). Rammohan of course was associated with the abolition of *Sati* and it was Vidyasagar who had advocated widow remarriage. The latter is never mentioned in the novel.

The compulsion to flesh out the cinematic text with background research material in the novel is not uniformly unsuccessful. Some of the references to Hindu scriptural texts like *Manusmriti*, *Gita* and *Mahabharata* are cleverly woven in. They provide narratives and quotes which act as an elegant counterpoint to the raw grimness of the life stories of the widows. Shakuntala, the only literate inmate of the widow ashram, narrates the story of her namesake, the legendary Shakuntala, to Chuiya, its latest entrant. The romantic tale of love, rejection and reunion through the complex operations of forgetting and remembering, acts as an unlikely bond between these two widows from very different backgrounds but subjected to similar social oblivion. Kalyani, the beautiful widow who is prostituted to run the costs of the ashram mechanically quotes the scriptural example of the lotus which blooms in mud but keeps itself pure, to justify her "sins". When her lover, Narayan, recites from Kalidasa's *Meghdootam*, the Sanskrit romance, she only asks in bewilderment if he is gentry, a *seth*.

For most of these illiterate widows the Hindu tradition is what the brahmin patriarchy says it is. Priests like Sadananda set down strict norms of acceptable behaviour for them even as they twist the scriptures to accommodate their own transgressions of body and mind. While widows must observe fasts, eschew luxuries and be sexually pure, if they caught a man's fancy it was permissible for them to go on secret assignations to rich

men's houses as Kalyani did. In this adult world of multiple standards, Chuiya asks blasphemous questions with the child's fearless innocence. The other widows swoon in shock when she asks Sadananda: "Where is the house for the men widows?" (p.81). The horror of widowhood is magnified through her child's gaze. The violence of tonsuring, the humiliation of begging on the streets and the denial of food take on a Dickensian aura, viewed through Chuiya's helplessness. The unrelenting scenes of raw cruelty (the widows scavenging among the dead Bua's paltry effects, Kalyani's beautiful hair being chopped off or her being sent to be prostituted, Chuiya innocently announcing to her middle-aged client that she has come to play) blunt our sensibilities. They appear routine in the purgatory-like ashram with its living-dead inmates, going through fixed tortures. Written off by their families, for these widows life was always elsewhere, in memories of abandoned homes or imaginations of afterlife. Yet Chuiya is invested with the warmth of vitality and of a shared creatureliness. She forges tender friendships with Kaalu, the dog she cares for maternally, with Bua, the dying widow for whom she gets a *ladoo*, with Kalyani and Shakuntala, her mentors and protectors in the ashram. She comes like a breath of fresh air challenging established power equations and asking difficult questions. Her presence highlights the complicated web of compromises, alliances and negotiations by which the widows live, the brutal forms of marginalization within an already outcaste society, the subtle distinctions between the old and the young, the educated and the illiterate, between those who could wield power and those who could not. Ironically it is Chuiya's vibrant, catalytic role which brings Kalyani's romance to light leading up to the tragic denouement. With Kalyani's death, Chuiya is chosen to perform her role. As Gulabi, the garishly dressed eunuch, takes her to be prostituted as she used to take Kalyani, time seems caught in a warp, cursed to endless repetition. However, the coming of Gandhi, at the end of the novel promises an apocalyptic release into a modern nation and a new destiny. Where Kalyani fails to find a new life, Shakuntala by handing over Chuiya to Narayan, Gandhi's follower, hopes for a better future for her.

But the other widows of Rawalpur remain without agency or hope, waiting for saviours and last minute rescues. The stranglehold of Hindu patriarchy has still not loosened. Even sixty years after independence Deepa Mehta's film could not be shot in Benaras and it still has not been shown in India. In this context Sidhwa's novel remains important as a testimony to the sufferings of women, past and present, who continue to be silenced.■

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Somewhere Between Here And There

Jug Surayya

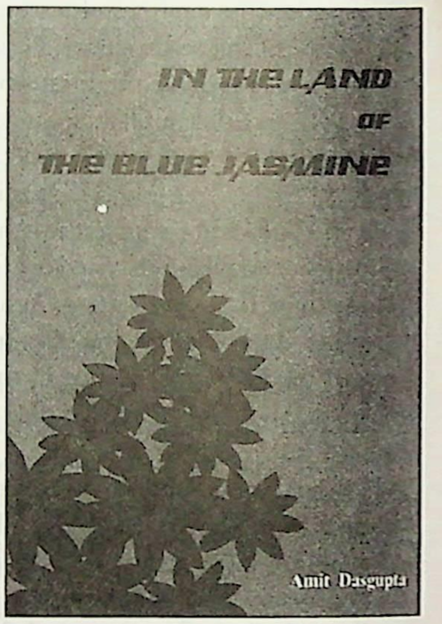
IN THE LAND OF THE BLUE JASMINE
By Amit Dasgupta
Star Publications, pp. 116, Rs. 195.00

Amit Dasgupta is a career diplomat who ruefully intimates that career compulsions have made him into something of a specialist on that bureaucratic labyrinth, the World Trade Organisation. Poring over the arcana of the Uruguay Round, and import quotas, and non-tariff barriers and intellectual property rights, and purchasing power parity – an exercise which might be likened to a latter-day version of sequestered monks computing the number of angels that could dance on the head of a pin – can have all kinds of repercussions. Fortunately for us, in Amit's case dealing with the terminal tedium of the WTO has led to a reflexive break-out in a world of delightful fantasy: In *The Land of the Blue Jasmine*, an enchanting moral fable guaranteed to enthrall a cross-generational readership.

While WTO-induced boredom may have been the subliminal cause that brought about the *Land of the Blue Jasmine*, its proximate cause is far more poignant and personal: like all stories that are truer to life than living itself, Jasmine contains a story within a story. This internal story is related by Amit in his back-of-the-book Acknowledgements.

In 1993, Amit's father died. To help the family – particularly his daughter Diya who was five years old at the time – come to terms with the sense of loss, Amit began to extemporize an allegory, in the form of a serial bedtime story, which would give meaning to mortality. This was the seed from which Blue Jasmine was to bloom, years later.

The story, as it evolved over time, narrates the adventures of an orphaned little girl called – what else? – Little Girl who journeys to the Land of the Blue Jasmine, a secret place "tucked away somewhere between here and there". Her travelling companions on this perilous journey are a talking "balloon of balloons" called Balloon, and a loquacious crow called Crow. Little Girl's mission – prophesied by a mysterious flute player – is to liberate the spirits of the undead who people this sinister and melancholic limbo so that they assume their rightful place as stars in the sky. In order to do this, Little Girl must make the ultimate sacrifice: she must accept the painful and irrevocable loss of her mother and father; she must relinquish her grief.



To make matters more difficult, the Land of the Blue Jasmine is ruled by the epitome of all evil, the twin-headed Serpent, who is abetted by his consorts, Hate and Envy and Anger and Malice and all those other monsters that haunt our minds. Quite a task for a little girl. Or even Little Girl. But help is forthcoming from unexpected sources, not the least of which is the indomitable faith in everyday folk that Good, against all odds, will triumph over Evil—but only if we chose for it do so. For Good and Evil are not out there, but in us.

Amit's tale doffs an appreciative cap to inspirations ranging from Tolkein to the *Wizard of Oz* and through to Harry Potter. His writing is tersely evocative (a roomful of reptiles is "a carpet of slither"; a thunderstorm becomes a stampede of wild horses) and the spiritual subtext of the story, leavened with humour, is conveyed without a trace of pulpit sermonizing.

When I began reading *Blue Jasmine*, I was down in the dumps, beleaguered by worrisome bugaboos and feeling pretty sorry for myself. By the time I'd finished reading it, the bogeys that had been bothering me had, like the consorts in the story, largely lost their sting. There's no doubt about it: Amit's concocted an elixir that's a sure-fire antidote to WTO blues and sundry other slings and arrows of our mortal fortune.■

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Principles vs. Expediency: Nehruvian Dilemma

Salil Misra

SELECTED WORKS OF JAWAHARLAL NEHRU (SECOND SERIES), VOL. 36 & 37
Edited by Mushirul Hasan
Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 705 & 636,
Rs. 700.00 each.

Jawaharlal Nehru, on a number of occasions and in a number of ways, defined himself as a product of the Indian National Movement and all that it stood for. This implied among other things anti-imperialism, commitment to national sovereignty, and a measure of internationalism. In addition Nehru also acquired early in his political career a left-wing orientation to politics. All this he inherited from the national movement and practised, with some exceptions, during his long tenure as independent India's Prime Minister.



Volume 36 (second series) of the *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* covering the period December 1956-February 1957, is an important testing ground for some of these values that Nehru professed. This is an important period for two major political events of international significance that were only distantly related to India's domestic politics: the Suez crisis and the Hungarian crisis. The two crises involved the major superpowers of the post-war world. The Suez question started with the nationalization of the Suez Canal by Egypt, followed by the formation of a military alliance between England and France, and the Anglo-French-Israeli attack on Egypt. The Hungarian crisis emanated from attempts within Hungary to break out of Soviet control, followed by a full-fledged invasion of Soviet tanks into Hungary. There were no natural compulsions on Nehru, the Prime Minister of India, to get entangled in the two issues. It was in fact the involvement in these issues, specially the Hungarian one that contained certain risks. Siding with Soviet Russia would have meant diluting the commitment to national sovereignty. Upholding Hungary's right of self-determination and resistance to external invasion implied antagonizing Soviet Russia, an ally in international relations. Neutrality might have been the safest course but it went against Nehru's perception of himself and independent India as a major actor in world affairs.

Involvement in the Hungarian issue had implications for India's own national interests. Soviet Russia made it clear to India that Hungary was as close to them as Kashmir was to India. If India dared to oppose the Soviet Union at an international forum, or did not side with the latter on the Hungarian question, the Soviet Union could withdraw support for India on the Kashmir question. This importantly was no empty threat.

On the Kashmir question the position of the western countries had been more pro-Pakistan than pro-India. The Indian plea of calling Pakistan the aggressor had found no favour with the western bloc. In the UN Security Council the Soviet Union had defended India's interests by vetoing all resolutions that sought to weaken India's position on Kashmir. However within a month of the Hungarian crisis, the Soviet Union actually demonstrated its threat by refusing to veto a Kashmir resolution in the Security Council that sought to undermine India's position on Kashmir. How did Nehru cope with these pressures?

The volume offers extremely useful information on these two complex issues and the formulation of Nehru's response to them. For reasons mentioned above, the Suez crisis was the less difficult of the two. Nehru saw the Anglo-French encroachment in Egypt as an attempt by the old colonial powers to reassert themselves. But he was convinced that the old type of colonialism was dead and gone and could not be restored however much anyone tried (p. 481). Nasser, the leader of Egypt, was a victim of imperial aggression and also an ally of Nehru. He could be persuaded by Nehru to refrain from taking extreme steps (like blocking British, French and Israeli ships in the Suez and taking the issue directly to the UN) and with the direct involvement of USA, the French and the English troops could be made to withdraw. The Suez crisis was resolved honourably and Nehru played a major role in this.

The Hungarian crisis was tricky and complex. Here the paths of realpolitik and principles did not converge. In fact the two could not be combined. One had to be sacrificed for the sake of the other. Nehru decided to uphold the principles of democracy and territorial integrity of nation-states, even though it amounted to antagonizing Soviet Union. This was something he had learnt and practised during the national movement. The discussions Nehru had with other leaders on the Hungarian question (with Eisenhower, the US President, pp. 541-43 and with Chou En-lai, the Chinese premier, pp. 587-92) bring out very vividly the influence of the Indian national movement on Nehru's personality and politics. He was emphatic in his assertion that Communism could not be imposed in a country where a majority of the people did not want it. The future of Communism lay in harmonizing with democracy and not in denying it. Moreover Communism would also have to respect national sovereignty. He asserted that the progressive forces in Communist countries "were working towards democratization" (p. 542) and that the Communist states would ignore democracy only at their peril. Nehru's understanding of Communism also reflected interesting nuances: "Communism, apart from its violence, coercion and other bad features, had certain idealistic elements in it which had attracted some very fine men and women, who only saw the idealistic part and ignored the other brutal parts of it" (p. 542).

Interestingly on these questions, the two leaders, Nehru and Chou En-lai looked at things very differently. Nehru treated the two cases—Egypt and Hungary—at par with each other. Both represented a violation of national sovereignty of Egypt and Hungary, by Anglo-French combine and Soviet Union, respectively, and so there was nothing to choose between the two. For Chou En-lai on the other hand, the Anglo-French encroachment into Egypt was reprehensible but the Hungarian case was something internal to the Communist world and therefore had to be sorted out 'internally' by the actors themselves without any outside intervention. In Chou En-lai's view, the western powers had encouraged subversive activities in Hungary in order to throw the socialist government there. The Hungarian government was not strong enough to handle the situation and therefore needed the support of the Soviet Union. "Our view is that the Soviet army's going to Hungary cannot be compared with the British and French invasion in Egypt" (p. 588) In Chou En-lai's view, Soviet Russia's entry into Hungary was a step towards the consolidation of the socialist camp, and therefore was to be welcomed. Nehru took the contrary view and thought that this could only be a step towards disintegration of socialism. Chou En-lai may have been right in the short run, but in the long run it was Nehru who was proved right by history.

Quite apart from the international situation and Nehru's role in it, the volume also provides interesting and useful information on the ongoing Kashmir problem and the second general elections held in 1957. There is enough information on the Congress manifesto, selection of candidates, role of money in buying allegiances, the election campaign and much more. This is an extremely useful volume not just for information on Nehru but also on the major national and international questions of the times.

Jawaharlal Nehru's growth as a political leader was accompanied by the great faith that was placed in the capacity of Indian masses for taking political decisions on their own. The idea came from Gandhi and was shared by many other leaders of the national movement. It was therefore little wonder that the Constituent assembly of independent India had no hesitation in opting for universal adult franchise. This was interestingly in spite of the fact that many western commentators had expressed their reservations regarding India's preparedness for a full-fledged democratic structure. Their argument was that Indian society should be opened up for democracy only gradually and in phases and that the extension of franchise should go along with the expansion of literacy. Nehru's own reply was that if the illiterate masses could participate in the national movement, there was no reason why they could not play an active part in electing their own government.

The first two general elections, held in 1952 and 1957, fully lived up to Nehru's faith in the political sagacity of Indian masses. Nehru was pleased with the elections not just because the Congress party won but also because the elections demonstrated to Nehru the success of the democratic experiment in India. The second general elections removed all doubts that democracy in India was not an aberration and had actually come to stay. The second volume under review provides extremely rich and useful accounts of Nehru's campaign during the 1957 elections, his understanding of the electoral process, its implications for Congress party and for country, the issues of national and international significance that emanated from these elections, the nature of political opposition, the strengths and weaknesses of Indian democracy, and the trajectory of Indian political politics from 1947 onwards. In addition, the volume also provides fascinating accounts of the election campaign, the slogan shouting and the mud slinging, the intrigues and manipulations, and the local flavours of the electoral scene. Anyone wanting to construct India's election profile or compare the elections today with those of 1950s will find this volume a minefield of valuable research material.

Nehru looked upon elections as a great opportunity for education both for the masses and their leaders. He called these elections a "vast university for the masses of the people…" (p. 54) and treated his election speeches as long lectures in this "university". In one such speech he gave a detailed and an excellent account of the Kashmir problem (pp. 11-13). In another one he listed out the achievements of Indian society since independence and the major tasks that were yet to be accomplished. In 1947 India achieved a political revolution, but the much more crucial economic revolution and social revolution were yet to be achieved (p.6). The two major events of the decade after Independence were the integration of the princely states and the abolition of the zamindari system. The former was an extension of the political revolution; the latter would feed into the economic and the social revolutions. The remarkable thing was that both were achieved without much violence and coercion and this was a uniquely Indian achievement. Nehru proudly declared that there were few countries in the world where such monumental changes had come about without violence.

The other issue that Nehru emphasized most eloquently was that of nationalism. During the national movement the ideology of nationalism was represented by the anti-imperialist struggle and national unity. After the British had left, it was national unity – political, emotional and psychic – that constituted the essence of Indian nationalism. "I know that you all know that India is one on the map politically and there is one government and we all have many bonds together. I want these bonds to become so strong, so intimate, bonds of the mind and the heart, that our nationalism can become a rock which can never break down whatever happens" (p. 3). He also used his election speeches as an occasion to remember Gandhi, pay tributes to him and highlight his contribution to India. Gandhi had not just mobilized the Indian people but taught them to be fearless. Even though the ideas of anti-imperialism had reached the Indian people before Gandhi, fear of the government had prevented them from coming out into the open. "The problem before Gandhiji was to infuse life into these lifeless bodies and collect the scattered strength of the nation. Gandhiji was a doctor who cured the old disease afflicting people. His key message was that the people should give up fear. People began to lose fear and there was brightness on their faces. They walked with their head erect" (p.14).

Nehru was severe on the opposition and treated them with contempt. The Communists, Communalists and Socialists were all subjected to vehement condemnation. The communal parties could ruin India with their ideology of "a thousand years ago". The Muslim League in Kerala was a "strange relic left" which should have been in the museum. "No doubt ultimately it will go to a museum" (p.37). Communism was a noble principle but the Communists' insistence on violence rendered them unsuitable for India. "I find it a little difficult to deal with the Communist Party because they shout so much." Nehru thought they were hopeless reactionaries, not revolutionaries. "Revolution does not mean shouting and violence. It means changing society, raising the standard of the people…" (p. 38). In some of his election meetings, specially in Kerala, Nehru took all the three together: "The communal parties can only bring ruin to India. The other parties like the Praja Socialists and the Communists have no moorings in India. The Praja Socialists have thrown their principles overboard. The Communists even after the setbacks in Hungary, try to repeat parrot-like the old text book lessons of a hundred years ago" (p.96).

After the elections Nehru urged the Congressmen not to gloat over the victory but give some serious thought to the rot that had begun setting in in the organization. Congress had begun losing its hold over the people, specially Muslims and the intelligentsia. There was an erosion of the local Congress bodies and a long stint in power had begun to corrupt the Congress party at various levels. Nehru hinted at a two-fold degeneration – growing corruption within and a gradual erosion of popular support. Both these trends were to accentuate further in the subsequent decades leading to a marginalization of the Congress party.

In spite of his occupation with the elections, Nehru did not lose sight of the larger picture and the various international issues kept gripping his attention. Perhaps his best articulation was reserved for the question of disarmament in the context of nuclear tests done by Soviet Union and Great Britain. His total disapproval of nuclear testing and the advice offered is perhaps more relevant today than it was forty years ago: "It is very curious that almost every country that possesses it (nuclear capacity), says that if you are sure the other party will not do it, we won't do it. Well, surely if that is so, let them all meet together and say we won't do it."

These are both extremely useful volumes bringing us the thoughts and activities of a multifaceted man.■

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Changing the World

Sarada Balagopalan

DEMOCRATIC SCHOOLS: LESSONS FROM THE CHALKFACE
Edited by Michael W. Apple and James A. Beane
Eklavya Publication, Bhopal, 2006, pp.144, Rs.110.00

If you believe Margaret Mead's words that we should, never "doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed it's the only thing that ever has", then the four examples of democratic schools presented in this book will enrich, invigorate and serve as a much-needed tonic. It appears as if there exists a universal tacit agreement on schools becoming factories, of being further distanced from the community etc. But there is seldom any global sharing on the ways in which educators on a daily basis strive hard to make schools open and democratic spaces. *Democratic Schools,* though it focuses on four schools in the US, has widespread appeal for educators everywhere because the narratives contain challenges that schools encounter globally which have been overcome, not by drastic structural changes but, by the perseverance and faith of a small group of committed citizens. As the editors point out, "These schools are committed to an education that build upon student and community needs, cultures and histories. They are committed as well to anti-racist, anti-homophobic and anti-sexist principles, and are organized around a deep concern for social justice." These make up the fabric of these schools including its curriculum and teaching practices as well as inform their assessment strategies, their work with the community and influence the processes by which everyday life in the school is carried out. In addition the important fact that all of these schools are government or public schools that face challenges of restricted budgets, standardized testing, the inertia of bureaucracy make these narratives, written by people who were instrumental in bringing about this transformation, all the more appealing. Lastly, these narratives are written by the same people who helped craft the democratic ethos of these schools and their descriptions discuss the tensions and obstacles that afflict any kind of systemic change as well as the sheer perseverance and belief in what one is doing that ultimately makes it possible.

The first of these schools is Central Park East Secondary School in New York City, the most well-known alternative secondary school in the US. Started in 1985 with eighty 7th graders the school has grown to more than four hundred students from grades 7-12. The school aims to teach students to "use their minds well, to prepare them for a well-lived life that is productive, socially useful and personally satisfying (p.48) which the co-directors of the school who have authored the narrative refer to as, "habits of mind, work and heart". Their description of the school is largely focused on the structure of the academic programme and its emphasis on the student learning how to learn. The school has drawn up an interesting set of questions across disciplines that it believes each child before graduating should be capable of answering with reference to the particular research they have undertaken. These questions include: How do you know what you know? From whose viewpoint is this being presented? How is this event or work connected to others? What if things were different? And why is this important? The students answer these through creating fourteen portfolios on various topics, some of which are core areas and others electives, and present this to a committee that also includes a member of their family. For this to work a structure that gives teachers time to plan and spend with students in getting to know them well is required and this is what this school has been able to work out very productively.

The Rindge School of Technical Arts in Cambridge, Massachusetts is primarily a vocational school that successfully managed to rethink vocational education so that their students no longer felt academically inferior to students who were in mainstream schools. They did this through introducing a programme called City Works in the 9th grade that made the city of Cambridge the primary "text" that students studied through individual and group projects. Using vocational methods including contextual learning, apprentice-master relationships and real clients, City Works aims to teach vocational students some basic and advanced academic skills that should inform any holistic approach to education. This necessitated a fundamental epistemological shift amongst teachers who were in large part craftpersons and this worked after much hard work primarily because they were not given a pre-set curriculum. Again the attendant restructuring of teachers, time, allowing for common planning time, creating interdependence amongst them, all of this are discussed as important elements that made the programme work.

La Escuela Fratney in Milwaukee, Wisconsin is a two-way bilingual elementary school well known for its multicultural and antiracist curriculum as well as its whole language literacy instruction. Located in a racially-integrated working class neighbourhood of the city, the school was begun in 1988—in an existing 90-year old school that was marked for demolition—by a small group of teachers, parents and community activists. Bob Peterson, a fifth grade teacher at the school describes the initial struggle in setting up the school and then goes on to describe the challenges of setting up a two-way bilingual programme. What is meant by this is that English and Spanish-speaking students instead of being divided up, are instructed in the same classroom with two teachers who teach in English and Spanish dividing the class time amongst themselves. The reason for introducing this was to actively negate the inferior language status that Spanish usually receives and to compel students to learn and equally respect both languages. This commitment to equality extends to their multicultural curriculum that goes beyond the "food, faces and facts" discourse. Peterson's narrative is particularly striking because it discusses in detail the difficulties of putting this school together and then distills in the end the main features that he believes have made the school a success, a success whose work is far from over.

Barbara Brodhagen a middle-school teacher at the Marquette Middle School in Madison, Wisconsin describes the ways in which she went about creating a democratic curriculum with students and teachers that developed out of the questions that children asked about themselves and the world. The students first develop their questions individually and then form teams to find common questions. In thinking through this further the students identify activities that will allow them to answer these questions which allows an accommodation of individual learning styles. The teacher's role is largely that of a facilitator and at the end of the day the teacher puts questions on the board that prompt students to reflect on what they have critically learnt and through this get them to discuss ideas at a greater abstraction. The students write these answers in a daily journal which the teacher checks to get a sense of whether the child needs additional learning experiences. The students are also involved in developing their own evaluations with the collection of every piece of work the student has done being collected in a portfolio which serve as the basis for the students' written self-evaluations.

Each of these narratives discusses a different aspect of the struggle to establish schools as democratic spaces. The only glaring absence is a candid discussion of the ways in which the lack of motivation and sense of malaise that we generally associate with government schools and their staff which does not form part of the discussions of these schools. Instead, what is delineated are the ways in which different mechanisms for transforming schools into democratic spaces were put into effect and the difficulties that were encountered. But it would be wrong to interpret this absence as the book being superfluous to the Indian context. Rather, the book's significance lies in its ability to inspire and remind educational practitioners about the central role they play in students' lives, and to reinforce the fact that children grow into critical and caring adults only by being part of a school space that values and trusts them and has unflagging faith in their intelligence and humanity.■

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Bonding Ties

Janaki Rajan & Sweta Rajan

FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION IN INDIA: PERSPECTIVES, CHALLENGES AND APPLICATIONS
Edited by Aparajita Chowdhury, David K. Carlson and Cecyle K. Carson
Rawat Publications, Jaipur, 2006, pp. 328, Rs. 675.00

The idea of family life education (FLE) evokes many images when it comes to India. The editors of the book under review remind us that FLE is relatively a new academic discipline and there exists no research-oriented theory based book on the subject. Preliminary search reveals this is not the case. A plethora of cross-national research exists on the role of the family in creating social reproductive labour[1], changing role of family in the era of globalization, gender relations and intra-household inequalities within families[2], the role of son-preference in female foeticide, work-family conflicts and well-being[3], sharing of work and caring responsibilities; to name a few. Existing family literature is divided between normative ideologies of preserving family values, and the individual-centered view of the autonomous household. This book clearly follows the former traditional perspective.

The premise of the book appears to be that the family has always been at the foundation of Indian society. Family members are now being exposed to new ideas and are not prepared or equipped to face the challenging world of today. The authors assure that FLE has tremendous potential to create stable, healthy, and happy families. The twelve contributors attempt to describe the situation of the various protagonists of the Indian family.

Aparajita Chowdhary explains what FLE means. She distributes its subject matter around relationships and communications with a managerial approach towards human and material resources. Sub-sections are devoted to adolescents, adults, parents, young married couples, and elderly people. The accounts are however static and stereotypical. The same static approach is pursued by N. Jaya in the section 'Stages and Tasks of the Family Life Cycle'. Developmental tasks of married couples, for instance, are prescribed great detail, separately, under two columns for husband and wife (p. 98). first task for husbands is "becoming established in an occupation". corresponding column for the wife is "making a home and managing household". Other tasks suggested for the wife are "becoming a financial helpmate in establishing the home and working until her husband is established, seeing work as secondary and possibly intermittent…and becoming a satisfying sexual partner". Misprints further down this table, make for strange reading such as for the wife: "to be prepared to become domesticated married men". Apart from proofing errors, this section has serious implications. They reinforce the traditional role of Indian women who are considered subservient to their husbands, whose income is only supplementary to family income and who is a passive subject without sexual control. These prescriptions fail to take into account the considerable shifts away from the traditional roles, which are being evidenced, in contemporary India.

Rita Choudhary's 'Understanding family life in India' suggests that the Indian family is in crisis and faces threats from external forces; a much repeated force being the new economic policies of 1991. Even cursory study of Indian families would show that the idea of Indian family was in stress at least three decades prior to this. The contradictions and everyday redefining of familial roles, gender inequalities and sexual divisions, the role of the state, are by and large viewed by the contributors only as a consequence of external challenges. There exist vast and excellent research and literature to prove the contrary.

For a book claiming to place FLE as an academic discipline it is sadly lacking in criticality and appears to speak to an outmoded perspective of India of the 1950s. Though referenced, the work is not evidenced. The book reads more as a series of myths about the Indian family. Remarkable in its absence is any account of tribal families in India who have notably different structures and practices. The family described in the book is really upper caste family, especially in the section on parenthood by T.V. Yamuna. It reinforces without questioning the stereotypical orthodox family values. Traditional myths of Indian society are being recycled under a new package.

G. Barada comes closest to bringing elements of reality into the picture of the families in India in the piece on contemporary family problems. However, it is devoid of critical analysis which is however true of the entire book. Sections in the book are arranged so that there is a separate section on contemporary family problems and a separate one lauding the contemporary Indian family. In this way, the editors have sidestepped theoretical analyses. The section on family life education in Indian socio-cultural context is devoid of specific context: social, cultural or otherwise.

Smitha Sinha's account of Language Socialization in contemporary Indian families begins well, and gives a good account of the ways language shapes the family. One expected more on the ways in which language of the young, influenced by media impacted on the family.

The section on family laws by Binayak Patnaik is detailed and informative. A description of the rich legal and public policy discourse of the relevance of some of the laws that exists today would have greatly enlivened the text. The sections on parenthood and Old age and family life in India are pedantic and self-evident.

Aparajita and David K. Carson in 'Developing Resiliency in Contemporary Indian Families, highlight the perceived strengths and weaknesses in the Indian family. For instance, "In modern India a woman is the center of the family—the emotional, and spiritual head… At the same time she is physically as well as socially vulnerable to sexual attacks and patriarchal oppression because of her deep faith, her courage, her love for family and indomitable will. As the old Indian saying goes: Without a woman, the home is the abode of ghosts" (p. 252). There is a surreal quality to this. It is as if the vigorous struggle for women's emancipation of the last century, the constitutional commitment to women's equality and the government's commitment to women's equality to redress the accumulated distortions of the past, and the one million women in local governance are realities of some distant country other than the one the authors describe. The forms of patriarchal oppression so naively being valorized in the chapter are one of dichotomizing a woman into the physical and the emotional and deifying her. It is one of the most powerful ways in which patriarchy operates. Other sub-sections on strengths, family values—none are specified, and the sovereignty of the family (over human rights?) is in a similar vein.

The last section brings us to the purpose of the book—the setting up of FLE in India. The purpose is laudable and institutionalized need much felt. What is going to be taught, however, if this book is an example to go by, is another matter altogether. Judging from the oft-repeated assurances of mental health that FLE promises, it appears, by implication, that the great Indian family has to guard against yet another challenge: the mental health of the family members.

As with everything about India, overarching notions, even if it is the idea of family, leave many things wanting. After 12 sections of family life education, the picture of the family we get is still very much a 'black box' hidden behind the four walls of the home in the private sphere. There are no live accounts of Indian families. The sense of oversimplification remains, leaving the reader wanting more: much more critical, nuanced and real accounts.■

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Socio-historical and Cultural Linkages

Amit Prakash

EDUCATION AND CULTURE IN NORTH-EAST INDIA (1826-2000)
By Lalit Kumar Barua
Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, 2006, pp.xiii+262, Rs.350.00

The volume under review examines the interlinkages between education and culture in Northeast India using a socio-historical and cultural lens. The author argues that the erstwhile province of undivided Assam's trajectory of development of education was quite different from the rest of India owing to the delayed growth of western and higher education in Assam. This in turn had a significant impact on the evolution of Assamese culture, identity and society.

Taking this theme forward, chapter one examines the impact of the interaction of emerging Assamese intelligentsia with western literature and philosophy. It dwells in detail on the broad patterns of evolution of the Bengal renaissance and its interaction with western science, knowledge and philosophy. While the bulk of the discussion in this chapter is a narrative of Indian renaissance, it puts forth the broad contours of the explorations of 19th and 20th century cultural and literary processes in Assam, which is developed in the chapters that follow. The author argues that "nearly three decades of educated elite in Orissa and Assam derived their mental make-up and intellectual aspirations by their study of English language and contacts with Bengali intelligentsia ..." The author also argues (rather contrarily) that the Assamese "also nurtured their own native traditions and culture, and felt responsible to their language and tradition..." (p. 17), which led to the emergence of many great personalities of Assamese literature such as Lakshminath Bezbaroa. Commenting that the contours of Assamese identity was premised on language, literature and culture (instead of ethnicity) was rooted in contesting imposition of Bengali as medium of instruction, the author offers no evidence to support the claim.

Discussing 'Northeast India in the Nineteenth Century' in chapter 2, the author locates the discussion in its historical perspective by examining the main features and impact of the policies followed in Assam and its continuities and fractures with those in rest of India. Offering a politico-historical narrative of the region, it is argued that a "sense of cultural identity was not a product of colonial forces; it was not confined to the elite" but can be traced to the "fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, which gave it a different kind of historical weightage" (p .48). It must however be confessed that the evidence cited to support this argument is rather thin and it seems that the policy of exclusion followed in the Northeast by the colonial administration (which has been seen as a significant force shaping postcolonial Assam) appears 'liberal' to the author.

Discussing the education and social change in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in chapter 3, the author describes the emergence and growth of education policy of British Indian administration but the focus is largely on Bengal with a secondary focus on the rest of India. Discussion about the main contours of the developments in the progress of education in Assam also tries to locate itself in the larger social transformation underway in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The author argues that the development of education, particularly higher education in Assam suffered due to "an unequal distribution of educational opportunities under the hegemony of the Calcutta University and the Bengal government" (p. 77). While underlining the uniformity of the emerging education system and also stressing that the Assamese intelligentsia was no less educated than any other part of the country (p. 77), the author makes a leap of faith to argue that their "social consciousness was derived from the egalitarian structure of Assamese society". In the author's view, they had managed to achieve the impossible task of imbibing "the important values like a sense of rationality,

While the volume under review is one of the few studies exploring the question of education and identity in the Northeast, the author seems to be using the terms 'Northeast' and Assam as synonyms. As a result, the analysis throws up a large number of issues which the author perceives as 'multiculturalism' but may be seen as Assamese cultural colonization by the smaller socio-cultural identities of the region. More substantially, while the volume aspires to address the issues of education and culture in the Northeast, bulk of the discussion ends up being that of Bengal and the rest of India.

secularism or love of Western democracy", which was "reinforced by their preference for the reformed agrarian structure, and representative political institutions ..." (p. 78).

The patterns of education and its correlation with social and political change have been discussed in chapter 5. The author argues that expansion of higher education in Assam raised political consciousness (linking it with the wider national movement), and contributed to the emergence of social and political organizations in the State. This laid the foundations for the transformation of Assamese society in the years to come. Chapter 5 delineates the process of the emergence of a self-conscious Assamese identity via the avenues of literary renaissance in the 19th century and its interaction with the larger Indian renaissance. The main features and impact of the writings of Laksminath Bezbaroa as the most significant literary figure in Assam renaissance and its impact on the development of the tradition of drama in Assamese literature has also been analysed. Chapter 6 locates the discussion on the impact of Assamese renaissance poetry and its impact on the process of the articulation of Assamese identity, along with the correlation between the national movement and its impact on Assamese society and culture. Drawing on the above discussion, chapter 7 delves into the historical roots of the cultural identity of Assam and the factors leading to its consolidation and assertion in the past decades. Chapter 8 examines the role of three Assamese novels which according to the author anchor much of the question of identity in the Northeast. The instrumentality of missionary activity in both expansion of education in the Northeast, particularly the frontier areas and the creation of new kind of cultural elite in the region with is significant impact on the self-perception of cultural identity of the region is the subject matter of chapter 9. Summarizing the main currents of the discussion in chapter 10, the author briefly delineates the emergence of plurality of ethnic identity articulation in the Brahmaputra valley and argues for new kinds of institutional structures to take the "problem of identity" out of "the realm of politics" (p. 240) – a highly contestable conclusion at best.

While the volume under review is one of the few studies exploring the question of education and identity in the Northeast, the author seems to be using the terms 'Northeast' and Assam as synonyms. As a result, the analysis throws up a large number of issues which the author perceives as 'multiculturalism' but may be seen as Assamese cultural colonization by the smaller socio-cultural identities of the region. More substantially, while the volume aspires to address the issues of education and culture in the Northeast, bulk of the discussion ends up being that of Bengal and the rest of India. A greater focus on Assam would have been desirable. Also, by anchoring a vast dialogic space on identity on the question of literary culture, the author has neglected the material bases of identity articulation. This has led to formulations about the uniquely 'advanced' socio-political texture of the socio-cultural process in Assam – a conclusion arrived at without much evidentiary basis.■

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An 'Ensemble of Relations'

S. Srinivasa Rao

LIFE AT SCHOOL: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY (SECOND EDITION)
By Meenakshi Thapan
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006, pp. xxxi +271, Rs. 295.00

Micro studies of schooling and life at school were literally non-existent in India till Meenakshi Thapan's first edition of the book was published in 1991. The book has brought into limelight the sociological forays into the micro-interpretive approach towards education and schooling in the Indian context. This is the first and only attempt so far by an Indian sociologist to bring out insights on the character and functioning of a school with the help of ethnographic method. The book has been successful in at least three respects. Firstly, it filled the vacuum in ethnography of schooling in India. Secondly, the book addressed gaps in understanding interpersonal relations among pupils and teachers and between pupils and teachers within the school. Thirdly, it captured the clash of notions of ideology of schooling and the exigencies of practical life in school.

Meenakshi Thapan primarily examines the Rishi Valley School in Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh. She spent nine months in the School in 1981 as part of her doctoral work, largely influenced by the emergence of studies in sociology of education in the West (David Hargreaves, Peter Woods, Andrew Pollard, etc.), which have converged multiple theoretical perspectives such as phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, and ethnomethodology into what is called micro-interpretive approach. These studies have transformed the area of sociology of education immensely and addressed the concerns of sociology of classroom and schooling as social process.

The choice of the school is interesting as it is based on a particular kind of philosophy and value system, which may not represent the schooling system in India in general. The school is founded on the educational ideas of a noted philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurthi and is a residential, educational and elitist school in character and composition of the student body. The second edition tries to chart out the continuity and change in world situation between 1981 and 2005, incorporating new theoretical orientations. The book largely remains the same as the first edition, except for the inclusion of twenty pages of discussion on the issue of change and continuity in school life. The dimensions of change in school life are mainly presented in the introduction to the second edition, without any special efforts to interweave the new material with the earlier one.

The book has nine chapters in all, including introduction and concluding comments. The introductory chapter describes the uniqueness of the Rishi Valley School and the author's approach towards the school. The second chapter presents the worldview and educational thought of Jiddu Krishnamurthi, along with his views on religion, individual and society, self knowing, freedom and religious mind. The third chapter of the book describes the organization of material and human resources, goal orientations and roles of key functionaries, the activities, pedagogic processes of the school. The description is strengthened by undertaking symbolic interactionist approach by the author. The contradictions, conflicts and dilemmas inherent in the school are presented in order to explore the differing goal orientations of different functionaries, their role expectations, relations between the teachers and other functionaries, and the ideological commitments of the teachers in the pedagogic process.

The fourth chapter of the book describes the school culture in terms of some of the fundamental values, norms, rituals and ceremonies, which characterize everyday life at school. The author explores the subjective meanings of the participants by using the phenomenological approach. In the backdrop of the rituals and ceremonies, the author reflects on the ideological nature of schooling. In the chapter titled, 'Teacher Culture', the author describes the school through the eyes of the teacher. She presents a typology of teachers in terms of their role perceptions as 'ideologue teachers' and 'professional teachers', strait-jacketing the teachers into more or less two groups. This may look simplistic to the reader, but they do present us with the tools to analyse the teacher culture. However, it would have been appropriate to capture the typologies in terms of the way the teachers perceive their roles vis-à-vis the pupils, instead of the simple ideological connotations of the school itself. Though the author does not make it so explicit, the classification appears more or less the same as David Hargreaves's classification of teachers as 'disciplinarians' and 'instructionists'. The difficulty with Thapan's classification is that both groups are shown to exhibit exclusivity and a teacher either belongs to this or that, without any scope for movement between the two types. In other words, it ignores the possibility that a teacher may exhibit the role of a 'professional' at times, and in some other times, he/she may exhibit the role of an 'ideologue'.

Chapter six focuses on the teacher interaction in both formal and informal contexts and examines the influence of the teacher culture, the ideology, the local order and also the structural organization of the school. The author uses the phenomenological approach along with symbolic interactionism to describe the conflictual nature of the interaction between different types of teachers in the school. According to Thapan, the effect of conflict is reflected in the exclusion of ideologues from the teacher's friendship groups in the informal setting and devaluation of their place in the dominant teacher culture. Chapter seven discusses the pupils' interaction with the teachers, key functionaries of the school, amongst themselves, their relationship with and attitude towards school work and events, which the author calls an 'ensemble of relations' and draws the inference that the conflict is brought about by the differences in the primary and secondary socialization and contradictions, dilemmas, and ambivalence towards the ideology of schooling. The teacher- pupil interactions in both informal and formal settings of the school form the content of chapter eight. The author describes the strategies pupils and teachers adopt to make the classroom/school context intelligible by studying the classroom processes and interactions.

One of the major limitations of the book has been the choice of the school itself. The experiences of the author in Rishi Valley School cannot be generalized to the overall schooling system in India as it has been founded on a particular kind of philosophy and is elitist in student composition. The ideology of the state and its reflection on the schooling may not be captured in the everyday life of the school which is at variance with the larger Indian reality. The type of school therefore makes the researcher focus on the philosophical and ideological bases of interactions rather than in sociological terms. Since the student body is more or less homogeneous in terms of the social class background, it has very limited application to the other state run schools. The inclusion of this line of analysis could have added true relevance of the work to the educational system in the country.

Secondly, the author avoids references to the socio-cultural diversity in the student body as it would have brought in the element of conflict and dilemmas in the process of schooling. The pupil sub-cultures are an important part of the overall understanding of the schooling process and the classroom contexts. Another problem with Thapan's work is that it reflects more or less the conceptual and theoretical orientations of western sociologists of education like Peter Woods and David Hargreaves.

On the whole, however, the book has been successful in capturing the everyday life of the school in its entirety. It has filled a void in terms of the micro-interpretive understanding of the school and is an important reference book for the master's and doctoral students of sociology in general and sociology of education in particular.■

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K Journals: A Forum for Deeper Educational Dialogue

Deepti Priya Mehrotra

JOURNAL OF THE KRISHNAMURTI SCHOOLS, VOLS 1 TO 10
Chief editor: Ahalya Chari
Krishnamurti Foundation India, Chennai, 2006, pp. 145, Rs. 120.00 each.

Originally slated as a publication for and by teachers within Krishnamurti schools, this journal has far wider relevance. The issues covered, ranging from contemporary crises in consciousness and the role of education, to detailed thoughts on curricula, content and subject teaching, are significant for teacher-educators, administrators, parents and indeed anybody with a serious interest in the educational challenges of our times. .

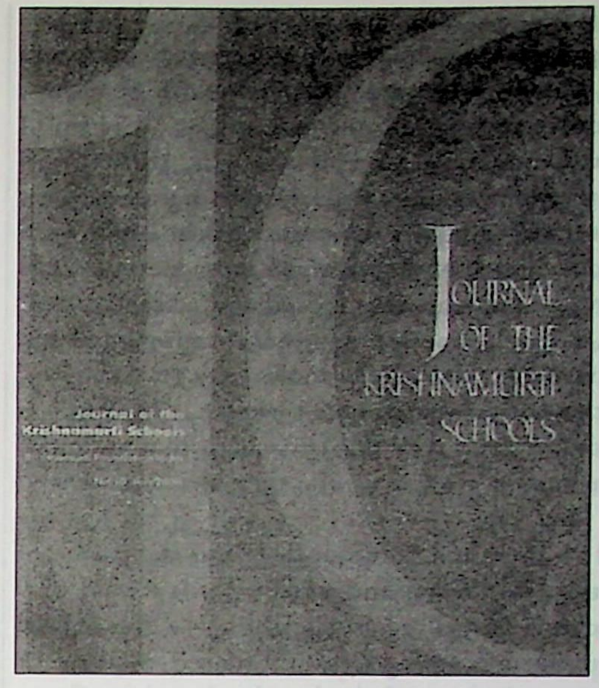
Most writers are from within 'K' schools – Rishi Valley in Andhra Pradesh, The School at Chennai, Rajghat Besant School at Varanasi, Sahyadri School in Maharashtra, The Valley School in Bangalore, Nachiket in Uttaranchal, as well as Brockwood Park School, England and Oak Grove School, USA. There are important contributions from others, including several teachers from Centre for Learning, Bangalore, ecologist Suprabha Seshan, publisher Gita Wolf, and dancer Leela Samson.

A number of the articles have emerged out of the living process of translating K's vision of education into practice. Combining philosophical depth with hands-on experiences of classroom teaching, the articles are stimulating and sensitive, with the potential to spark off debate. For the present review I will dip into some of the treasures contained in these volumes, providing a sampling of the rich fare.

Education is, "…learning not only in the field of conceptual rationality but, in a much more vital sense, it is learning in the field of Being – the field of 'what we are'…. True education should mean growth and creativity both in rationality and in personal life" ('The Two Aspects of Education', O.R. Rao, No. 2). This theme runs throughout the volumes, for in the K perspective education is not just about academic learning, but more importantly about how to be a good human being. Good teaching stems from the identity and integrity of the teacher. The teacher's task includes work on oneself, questioning existential blockages such as addictive habits, obsessive self-images and the hunger for approval.

Editors of the *Journal* note, "the teacher is as much a learner as the student. Learning cannot fully be addressed outside a life of mindfulness" ('On Nurturing the Motivation to Learn – Outcome of a Group Discussion', No. 8). They appreciate a certain fluid quality of engagement between teacher and students, ability to see beneath the surface of classroom situations, read students' responses without categorizing and evaluating, and share enthusiasm for the subject without becoming overbearing. They describe the process of nurturing learning with the aid of a dynamic academic curriculum, built from the ground up, and subject to review and change so as to remain relevant.

Shama Husain, teacher and parent, muses that schools need a responsible, sensitive and multifaceted curriculum that redefines what is excellence, and addresses the totality of each child ('In Quest of Total Excellence', No 6). Shailesh Shirali writes of 'Competition and its Educational Consequences: Is There an Alternative?' (No. 6), discussing the extremely negative effects of standardized comparison-based evaluation methods, and outlining a model of cooperative, non-competitive assessment. G. Gautama explores how school administration can be egalitarian rather than authoritarian. He asks, "Can the working space in institutions such as schools carry a deeper



quality of intelligence, and not a tussle for power and influence, obvious or subtle?" His message is that it *is* possible to conceive of, and create, vibrant alternatives ('School Administration: for Humanness and Vitality', No 10). Both Shirali and Gautama are very grounded as they draw on their years of experience as Principals, respectively, of Rishi Valley School and The School.

A number of teachers have written about their experiences within the classroom. Roopa Devadasan describes a novel experiment of teaching science through yoga to class 6 students ('Yoga in the Classroom', No. 9). Other gems on creative science teaching include: 'And I Thought I was Teaching Chemistry!' by Yasmin Jayatirtha (No. 2), Neeraja Raghavan's 'Igniting Minds: With Science on Wheels' (No.10) and 'Confessions of a Science Teacher' by Colin Foster (No. 10). Foster dwells on the importance of explaining context and values, not just formulae and laws. Ragahvan indicates the importance of keeping alive the child's sense of wonder, while Jayatirtha notes that science teaching should help children appreciate underlying relationships and harmony in nature, and "go beyond, to explore the realm of the self with the same awareness as one would look at a lily or a house".

In 'Breaking New Ground: Sourcing Material for the History Classroom' (No. 8), Venkatesh Onkar, Akhila Seshadri, P Ramesh and Alok Mathur reflect on textbooks that go beyond traditional approaches and meet the need for accessible, insightful and well-written history. Toon Zweers' 'Learning to Look into the Mirror' notes history can be liberating if we connect to the subject matter emotionally as well as intellectually, develop a critical mind, identify silences in the story, uncover power structures and expose our assumptions to critical awareness (No. 9). Kamala Mukunda encounters children bristling with prejudices absorbed from the rest of society, but what is even more insidious, her own adult mind too is conditioned by countless stereotypes and prejudices. She asks whether it is possible to go beyond this conditioning, and learn to live creatively ('Innocent Prejudice', No. 8).

Suprabha Seshan of Gurukul Botanical Sanctuary, Wynad, explores 'nature education' that awakens a deep sense of connection with nature ('River Talk, no. 8 and Alienation from the Wild', No. 9). Leela Samson notes the great value of art in education: "Learning or experiencing art can be so much a thing of joy that we are not quite conscious of the amount or depth of the learning that is taking place." Children respond naturally to rhythm, music, movement, colour, and good education must nurture this spirit in each child ('A Feeling for Beauty: Dance in Education', No. 10). V.R. Devika looks at how exposing children to traditional theatre and music helps them understand and respect diverse modes of communication ('Building Bridges Between School and Village: Traditional Performing Arts', No 8). Kamala Anil Kumar describes traditional children's games that promote gentle and cooperative values ('Tamarind Seed and Little Children', No 2).

Stephen Smith suggests the need to build a time for silence at the very core of the school. If education is first and foremost a work in consciousness, "it is imperative that we implement a new kind of learning commensurate with the crisis we are facing." A heightened, watchful awareness, that receives the totality of the present, leads to active learning and the flowering of intelligence. ('Being Nothing, Doing Nothing – Cultivating the 'Other

Part' of the Brain', No. 8).

People often ask what happens when children from 'alternative' schools come into the mainstream. Meredy Maynard's 'Dancing with Shadows', her graduation address to a class at Oak Grove School, muses: "The world is on the brink of environmental disaster and we, too, suffer from complacency and an illusion that someone else will take care of the problems for us.... We are beginners at treading lightly upon the earth and with each other...." She speaks beautifully of each of the six students graduating (Class of '97), then says, "These are the students that kicked and screamed their way into young adulthood, I think, because adulthood represented too many boxes and narrow grooves, far too much conformity to the norm. These are the questioners, the critics, the trouble-makers.... My hope is that they keep stirring up trouble. That they don't succumb to a notion of what they should be but continue to grow into who they are, because who they are is so very precious" (No. 2).

A few articles scattered in these ten volumes dwell on the theme of helping students identify their interests, and career guidance. A new initiative, located at Valley School, Bangalore, is described — a Post School Program for young adults interested in taking a year off for self-enquiry. An essentially individualized program, it aims to help the school graduate figure out what s/he wants to do in life. The Program brochure notes, "There is perhaps a totally different way of discovering a means of livelihood. This may be through finding out what one loves to do, what comes naturally and effortlessly, in the exercise of which there is a sense of creative happiness." ('After School, What?', No 9)

Clearly, all this is very different from the routine, standardized, bureaucratic system most of us live within. Under the guise of education, quite the opposite is happening. There is urgent need for seriously engaging with creative alternatives. *The Journal of the Krishnamurti Schools* provides a forum, a platform for dialogue. Such exchange is essential, for wider qualitative transformation in educational thought and practice.■

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Simulation and Imagination

Amiya P. Sen

MYTHS= MITHYA. A HANDBOOK OF HINDU MYTHOLOGY
By Dr.Devdutt Pattanaik
Penguin Books, Delhi, 2006, pp.206, Rs.250.00

I found Devadutt Pattanaik's work to be commendable in many ways. For one, there was the sheer pleasure of reading through elegant and evocative prose. There were, at several places in this book, an expression, a turn of phrase that surprised one by their potency and richness. These said or suggested many more things than what I had come to expect. "The practice of igniting *tapa* is known as *tapasya*', writes Pattanaik (p.151), overturning many a conventional rendering of this term. I must also confess that reading this book was a humbling experience for, at the end of it all, it struck me more forcefully than ever that perhaps mythology was better understood outside pompous academic discourse and myths more intelligibly decoded through a holistic, integrated understanding of the cultural stitches used to sew together tradition. I would be greatly remiss if I did not also add that this is one of those rare productions where the author is also the illustrator, and a pretty god one at that.

Pattanaik's book is spread over four parts. There is a short introduction followed by three larger sections, each of which deals with a pair of divinities—Brahma and Saraswati in the first case, Vishnu and Lakshmi in the second and Shiva and Shakti in the third. Some well -known myths and parables related to these gods/goddesses are then placed under the relevant section. In Pattanaik's understanding, each of the three major sections correspond to a certain genre of myths, to a distinct way of looking at the interrelationship between man, divinity and nature. Thus, myths related to the first represent explorations of the nature of the universe; the second, with a conscious desire to extract cultural meaning from natural law and phenomena and the third, with a metaphysical concern with transgressing matter (nature) and with salvation. Apparently, the myths and the meaning implicit in them are as structure-bound as is the text that seeks to explicate them. Pattanaik's choice of myths too is in no way quixotic but largely drawn from epic and puranic sources. They re-narrativize familiar stories but in a manner that is both entertaining and original.

If I have been at all able to understand him correctly, the quintessential argument that our author makes in this work is that the objective world—the world outside us, is our own creation and hence, the meanings that we derive from it mirrors our own memories, desires, ideas, thoughts, feelings, values and judgments. At the same time, without this world, we would not exist ourselves since it is through it that we validate our existence and define our manifold experiences. This dynamic relationship between the subject and object, the observer and the observed, as Pattanaik argues, also coincides with the synthetic divide between the constructs of *Purusa* and *Prakriti*, soul and matter, culture and nature. This is also the background against which Hindu myths are born and acquire meaning.

It is entirely possible that critics would locate in such arguments, the remnants of Hindu Idealism, an important form of which occurs in Advaita (non-dualistic) Vedanta. My own areas of disagreement with the author, however, lie elsewhere. Ironically enough, it is Pattanaik's own conclusions that persuade me to question if myths may at all be equated with *mithya* (falsehood). The spiritual journey that Vedic sages and philosophers really speak of is not from *mithya* to *sat* (Truth) but from *asat* to *sat* as captured in the beautiful invocation in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad.* Perhaps in a deeper sense therefore, *asat* could be as removed from *mithya* as imprecision or inexactness is from lying and falsehood. Also, if as Patanaik claims, our ancestors were rational enough to reject the objective existence of virgin births, flying horses and parting seas (p.xv), this would only encourage the

I am much beholden to this book and its author for alerting me to the possible pitfalls within historical reductionism and for beckoning me to a world of creative imagination that has hitherto remained unexplored.

counter-represent claim that myths, rather than deliberate falsehood, were truth-claims, albeit of a different order of conception. In the Hindu tradition, supra-human feats by avatars have often been validated by arguing that such accomplishments cannot be understood or rationalized in human terms. Especially, in the Vaishnav tradition, such acts were also situated within the framework of *lila,* God's play on earth that was indeed capricious but never 'false'.

I wish Pattanaik had brought out more clearly the palpable inconsistencies within myths relating to the same divinity. Thus the four heads of the God Brahma have been very differently explained by referring to the amorous glances that he allegedly cast at his own daughter (Satarupa/ Saraswati) and as representing the four Vedas. Again, in some renderings, Satarupa herself is depicted as Brahma's daughter and in some others, as his wife. The critical question to ask here is whether such conflicting interpretations could then lead to a comparable set of meanings. I also wondered if, as claimed by Pattanaik (p. 90), the slaying of *asuras* always coincides with the autumnal harvest. One example he cites here is that of Dassera, which, incidentally, represents the slaying of a *rakshasa* (Ravana), not *asura*. On the other hand, so far as my knowledge goes, festivities related to the slaying of Mahisasura at the hands of the Goddess Durga occur (in the months of Aswin-Kartik), at least a month prior to the autumnal harvest in Aghrayan. Speaking purely for myself I have to say that Pattaniak's otherwise very perceptive work does not sufficiently illuminate certain problems related to Hindu mythology that I have found quite baffling. Assuming that in the Hindu tradition, time is degenerative, albeit in a cyclical fashion, why is it that the most revered avatars like Rama and Krishna appear not in the 'purest' Kreta (Satya) yuga but in the relatively less exemplary Treta and Dwapar ? And why is it that at the end of the Mahabharata war, Kali yuga sets in, even as the 'righteous' have won and Dharma rightfully restored? Finally, I have wondered how myth-makers could gloss over the fact that while other avatars either 'rescued' the Vedas or upheld it, the Buddha in his rejection of the same, was clearly a discomforting exception.

There are places where Pattanaik is truly brilliant with his comments and observations. One such observation that I found particularly penetrative is that which tries to explains the Hindu's penchant for metaphysics in terms of his preferring the subjective world over the objective (p.204). Personally, I am much beholden to this book and its author for alerting me to the possible pitfalls within historical reductionism and for beckoning me to a world of creative imagination that has hitherto remained unexplored.■

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An 'In-between' Place Reconstructed

Maitri Baruah

THE LEGENDS OF PENSAM
By Mamang Dai
Penguin Books India, 2005, pp.192, Rs. 200.00

Mamang Dai's book is a fascinatingly nuanced account of the life of the Adi tribe of Aruanchal Pradesh. Here is an upland valley, an immensely varied and difficult terrain, and wedged in by the deep gorges and dense forests. The Adis have lived there for ages nurturing their long history and unique ways of life. Many of the stories in the book contain authentic transcripts of the oral traditions of the Adis, all of which the writer relates with unusual insight and sensitivity. One not only comes across the Adi myths and legends but also sees how these originated in the first place.

The story telling mode adopted here is best suited if one seeks to rediscover or reinvent the Adi oral tradition. The stories fill in every significant detail of the life and landscape of the Adi country. A few of the stories are told in the mould of the traditional folk tales; others enact traditional rituals through song and dance. Alternating between stories, myths and autobiography, the book very fluidly merges present and past, individual and the collective to reconstruct the 'pensam' — the 'in-between' place which is the land of the Adis. For the Adis, memory is, or the acts of remembering are central to the way they live, the proximity to the magical beliefs, which enable them to understand and negotiate change. The writer is part of the audience and is privy to an animated world. The noted oral historian, Luisa Passerini had said that the examination of memory through the use of oral forms had helped her introduce subjectivity to history.

Using forms of oral history, Mamang Dai attempts to give subjectivity to the Adis and the result is a complex exploration of the relationships between history, subjectivity, memory and identity. The book opens with a section called 'a diary of the world' with the sub-title 'we have long journeys in our blood'. The prologue too describes the pulsating landscape as a journey across time and history. The river cuts through our land as before in its long journey to the sea. In spring the red flowers still blaze against our sky. But the old people now, the few of them alive, turn slowly in their sleep as the fires burn down to a heap of ash. In the middle of the night, a bird swoops low and calls out in a wild, staccato note.

The narrative begins with the description of another journey. This refers to the journey the villagers undertook when the migluns or the British recruited them to construct the famous Stillwell road connecting Assam and China. Hoxo, one of the narrators in the book, has a memory of the journey and what he saw then acquires a mythical significance. Hoxo could never recall events before that journey and in his dreams he saw a 'blazing sun that spun earthwards and exploded in a burst red fire'. In this context, one can note that the sun is central to Adi mythology and the cult of almighty Donyi – Polo, which is the corner stone of the indigenous faith of the Adis. The writer's creative and imaginative engagement makes it a strong and vibrant awareness in the book. The great river close to the village is a resonant presence in the whole narrative. So is the beauty of the marvels of nature and of the season when the red flowers and the orange trees blossom in the valley. But there is another aspect of the Adi country, the terrifying landscape that the Adis have to encounter on their journeys to harvest the deadly aconitum needed for the preparation of the poison arrows. The rivers are 'hungry for lives' … and the 'mountains waiting to tear the breath out of their lungs'.

In the first story under the section 'songs of the rhapsodist', the dancers enact events and rituals that recall the experience of reality embedded in the collective memory. These are called the rhapsodies of time and destiny, which an Adi must guard. It is the language of the song, the ballad as we know. The theme of time and destiny, which the old songs celebrate also gets connected with the cataclysmic changes that affect the individual and the community. Colonization and the electoral politics of the postcolonial nation state have their impact. The ancient Kebang, the traditional system of justice has given way to the faulty modern legal system.

Ecological contours are changed drastically by the earthquake of 1950 and the contractors' regime of the post-independence period. The land was changing, and with these changes lives were changing. Kao saw the river spreading like the sea and watched the sun where it fell into the distant waters. Nenem stared at the restless agitated land and her eyes scrutinized the broken line of the hills. Nenem, who is buried in the grove of orange trees is called the river woman in the story that describes the vicissitudes of the life of an Adi woman who carries the burden of time and history. The two long stories 'River Woman', and the 'Scent of Orange Blossoms' help us conceptualize the subjectivity of the Adi woman who negotiates and finds ways to express her desires against existing norms and hard conditions. The story of Nenem in particular and her relationship with David, the British intelligence officer also provides a fascinating counterpoint to the narrative of oppressive exploitation associated with the effects of colonization. Towards the end there is a sense of loss and disenchantment. The depredation of nature or the cutting down of forests is only a thin end of the wedge. The real threat is to the traditions that define the Adi identity. Perhaps the beginning of the world was something like that. Keyum. That is what we call that darkness beyond the reach of the memory.

The mountainous regions of India's northeast and the upland valleys had remained a terra incognita for a long time. Colonial ethnography provided mere constructs and types of the life and habitat of the principal tribes: the Adis, Apatanis and the Mishmis. The Late Verrier Ellwin made a remarkable contribution in these fields by combining research and empathy. However, the real texture of the life of the tribal communities — the life lived in flesh and blood remains untapped till today in creative writing. Born and brought up in these highlands, Mamang Dai can understand and write about this life as no one else can. The present book goes to show that she has also the capacity to see with the creative inner eye. It is not surprising therefore that she has created something quite out of the ordinary. ■

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Meaningful Education

Tanya Matthew



Arvind Gupta has had a varied and distinguished career since he did his B. Tech in IIT and worked at TISCO and TELCO. He left this conventional job to join the Hoshangabad Science Teaching Programme (HSTP) initiated by NGO Kishore Bharati. It is here that he began innovating with science experiments using local materials. Later that year he worked with the architect Laurie Baker on a low-cost housing programme for the poor. He returned to TELCO, but left after two years, and this time *never to return*. He says that there were questions in his mind to which he could not find answers as long as his time and energy were taken up by his work. On realizing that he had only "Spartan and austere needs" and that he could "eke out a living anywhere" he decided to quit his job. "In retrospect," he says, "I think it was the right decision."[1] The lakhs of people, especially students and teachers who have benefited from his work will probably *testify to this*.

For the fortunate students and teachers who know of Gupta, his name is synonymous with the toys he makes. He has been involved mainly with the teaching of science to children through these toys. He has popularized it through innumerable workshops that he has conducted for children and teachers, in remote villages and cities, as well as in other parts of the world. He says that making toys has come naturally to him and that even in his childhood he was a "tinkerer." These toys are exceptional because they are created from junk. They are accessible to all children because they can make them on their own, from available and unwanted material ranging from used matchsticks to tetra-packs. By making and playing with these toys, not only do children learn how science is functional in everyday life, but are sensitized to the possibilities that waste material offers. Gupta is known for the jhola he carries full of toys that follows him from school to school. His "happiest moments," he says, "are when children show me the toys they have made all by themselves."

Gupta has been working during the past three years at the Children's Science Centre, which is part of Inter University Centre for Astronomy & Astrophysics (IUCAA), Pune. Together with Vidula Mhaiskar, a microbiologist, and Ashok Rupner, a grass roots activist, he has conducted around two hundred workshops for children last year. Every workshop accommodates about fifty children who spend the day at the centre making toys, free from the policing gaze of teachers or parents. In around four hours, the children make a dozen or so toys that they are allowed to take home with them. These toys include, for example, a pump to 'pop' a balloon, a simple electric motor, a straw flute, a paper protractor, matchstick models and many others.

For children who have not had the opportunity of attending one of Gupta's workshops, there is always the option of reading about making toys from his books. Most of his books are printed by the National Book Trust and Vigyan Prasar and are cheap and easily available. They can also be downloaded from his website www.arvindguptatoys.com. His first book *Matchstick Models and Other Science Experiments* sold over a million copies and was printed in over twelve Indian languages. He is currently working on a new book on science activities. In *Pumps from the Dump*[2] he describes several ways of making pumps from easily available, inexpensive material and junk. These range from balloons to hollow papaya stems. The 'Inertia Pump' for instance, can be made from a long hollow tube: a PVC pipe, a hollow papaya or bamboo stem. This pump squirts water out of a bucket! Since it does not have an inbuilt valve it requires using one's palm as a substitute. The child is therefore able to understand how a valve works when she recreates the effect of the valve herself. In *Matchstick Models and Other Science Experiments* Gupta describes ways of making patterns and three-dimensional figures from matchsticks. This serves as an engrossing way of learning geometry rather than from the boring pages of a textbook.

Gupta also explores how the world of nature can become the source of unending learning for a child. In *Fun With Seeds, Fun With Stones* and *Leaf Zoo*, leaves, seeds and stones become the building blocks for making figures of animals and birds. *Ten Little Fingers* has a section that shows how the same materials may be used to learn about shape, colour and size by grouping them (which is similar to what is done in Montessori schools). In *Ten Little Fingers* he recounts an interesting incident, which occurred when he was working with the Hoshangabad Science Teaching Programme. One of the students forgetting to bring her dissecting needle, discovered that a 'Babool' thorn worked perfectly in its place. Gupta says, "This little girl had taught the Science Programme a great lesson."[3] Instead of buying the needles that were not available in the village from a nearby town they just needed to look for local materials.

The constant reiteration in most of his books is that children must be allowed to discover and explore the world around them. Parents often get their children toys that are expensive and transfer their apprehension about breaking the toy onto the child by way of a warning. What they do inadvertently is kill the child's natural curiosity and desire to learn about how things work. Most schools perform a similar negative function. Children are taught from uninteresting textbooks from which they are made to learn pieces of information by heart. Gupta says in his book *Little Science*:

> Today textbooks have become synonymous with knowledge. Educationists seem to be in a hurry to shovel concentrated doses of knowledge down the throats of children, without bothering whether the children can assimilate them.[4]

When school becomes an unpleasant experience, children can only be persuaded to study through fear or the motivation to do better than their classmates. In such a case there is no real love for the activity, but only a desire to please others. In *Learning Can Be Fun* (co-authored with Sunita Pandhe) Gupta says:

> The system of rewards creates an artificial interest in the activity. Children motivated by rewards lose interest in the activity soon after getting the reward.[5]

A Dossier on the Crimes of Schooled Societies and *Learning Can be Fun*, are evidence of his concern for meaningful education in the country. One can see from *A Dossier...* that he lays great importance on the reprinting of educational classics like *Danger: School*, Kuroyanagi's *Totto Chan: The Little Girl at the Window* and Gijubhai Badheka's *Divaswapna*. After all, Laxmiram the protagonist of Divaswapna did away with his class's textbooks and started a library with the same money. He hoped that his students' eyes would be opened to a wider and more colourful world than what the textbooks had to offer. "It is a shame," says Gupta, "that no school has built up on this progressive idea."[6] He adds that Gijubhai practised what Paulo Freire popularized half a century later, the motto: "not the word but the world."[7] *Totto-Chan* is the story of a young Japanese girl who is expelled from her school because she does not fit the mould. Her mother however takes her to an unconventional school, which is housed in an abandoned railway carriage. Here students are allowed to learn what interests them most. Some prefer to draw, while others do science experiments. Mr. Kobayashi, the Principal, makes sure that there are activities that suit all children, even a physically handicapped boy. Gupta says he recounts the stories of Totto-Chan and Divaswapna in most of his workshops. "The educational soil in our country is barren," says Gupta, "[and] in such harsh conditions even a good seed would wilt." Books like Divaswapna and Totto-Chan "help create a fistful of soil, and hope for innovative experiments in education to take root."

In the last two years, Gupta and a team comprising Vidula Mhaiskar, Arvind Paranjpye and Ashok Rupner have worked hard at digitizing over four hundred books that have been uploaded and are available free for download at www.arvindguptatoys.com. There are several children's books, books on education, science activities, peace and anti-nuke. The team has also got fifty books translated into Marathi, which are also on the website. During the last eighteen months, over thirty thousand people have

downloaded books from the website. These books have also been put on a single CD, which they share with teachers from small towns where they do not have easy access to good books. Gupta is jubilant at how "Modern technology enables us to gift a veritable library of four hundred passionate books to a teacher for a measly sum of eight rupees"!

In this competitive age, when children must do exams even in Kindergarten, and seldom have time to play, Gupta is still positive that there will be change. In his visits to various schools, he says he has come across "young minds (of both teachers and students)... thirsty for innovation". Even if the board exams remain the same, he has faith in the power of individuals to make a difference. One has to only turn to Gupta's own life to see the extraordinary contribution that a single person can make through untiring dedication.■

Reference

[1] Excerpts from an interview with Gupta on email. (All quotations that are not footnoted are from the interview.)

[2] www.arvindguptatoys.com (all books and essays are from the same website, accessed last on 17 September, 2006)

[3] Gupta, Arvind, *Ten Little Fingers (Part One)* www.arvindguptatoys.com

[4] Gupta, Arvind, *Little Science www* www.arvindguptatoys.com

[5] Gupta, Arvind and Pandhe, Sunita *Learning Can Be Fun* www.arvindguptatoys.com

[6] Gupta, Arvind, *A Dossier on the Crimes of Schooled Societies* www.arvindguptatoys.com

[7] Paulo Freire was a dedicated Brazilian educationalist and author of the classic *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. This reference to him is also taken from the interview with Gupta.

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Books-in-Brief



GAIA'S CHILDREN
By Manisha Gadekar
India Book House, 1997, Rs. 55.00

Gaia's Children is a charming collection of stories about the various living forms which coexist on our earth, creating a whole. The aim of the stories in this book is to explain and create an awareness among the children about the earth. Each story in this book tells a fascinating tale about the decreasing natural life that occupies it's own niche on our living planet. An introduction to each tale gives us important details about a species. It also serves to explain certain important issues about conserving the natural life that inadvertently sustains us.

The tales prove to us how inhuman we are towards nature and wildlife to fulfill our needs. The stories prove how greedy we people have become, that we kill animals for their meat, medicinal values and money.

However stories like 'The Caterpillar and the Lime Tree' and 'Flamingo city' show us how kind, gentle and helpful nature is. 'The Arrogant Tusker' and 'The Mischievous Macaque' are stories which tell us teamwork is necessary for all living organisms and two heads are better than one.' Some other stories show that animals maintain a symbiotic relationship with other organisms.

But we humans still don't realize the importance of nature. We don't realize when we cut a tree or kill an animal we disturb the food chain which in turn disturbs the eco-system. We also suffer because of the ecological imbalance. This is proved by the global warming and extinction of animals.

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Moneesha Sharma

Compared to just a few years ago, more and more children's books on the environment are being published in India. The 'environment' and 'environmental education' now loom large in the consciousness of educators, schools and teachers, particularly in view of the recent Supreme Court judgement. They have all scrambled to comply with it and have tried to meet adequately the requirements of environmental education, whether it is suitable teachers or resource materials or even juggling the timetable in order to accommodate an additional subject. Somewhere in all this there is the danger of losing sight of the real purpose of environmental education – developing in students awareness, understanding and sensitivity about the environment. How, otherwise, will future conservationists and environmentalists or even a concerned citizenry emerge from the young people of today? Children are extremely receptive to environmental issues and that it is easy to develop sensitivity and concern in them provided the teaching-learning process is child-friendly.

That is why it is laudable indeed that an effort is being made to bring out books about the environment for children and it is to be hoped that they will be easily and widely available for teachers and children. However, in books that aim to educate and sensitize, not only does the presentation have to be suitable for the intended readership, issues of language and vocabulary need to be addressed as well, particularly for Indian children. If they have sufficiently developed reading skills, they might make a guess at unfamiliar words or language. This is particularly so for fiction where the force of the narrative keeps the child interested. In information books, on the other hand, this does not necessarily hold true, and too many unfamiliar words and phrases can have a turning off effect. If a child finds a book difficult for any reason it is likely to be put aside, thus defeating the whole purpose of producing the book. Unfortunately, many adults working with or for children, whether as teachers, writers or publishers, find it difficult to see things wholly from a child's point of view.

This is what seems to have happened in some of the books among the clutch under review. For example, young children find it easier to read text which is bold and on a clear background. Some of the books under review miss out on this simple matter – white text on yellow or light green is not child-friendly, nor is a fine black print particularly on a textured background. Even for older children, layout and vocabulary are important. There has to be a careful balance between too simplistic an approach and a too technical one, admittedly not easy to achieve, particularly when the author does not seem to be clear about the age of the target readership. Illustrations are of course vital in children's books, but care needs to be taken to make them appealing.

The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) has, for several years, been involved in developing awareness and sensitivity to the environment. The annual Green Olympiad and Terraquiz—an examination and quiz for school children from India and other countries—are relatively recent initiatives. The questions and answers of the first five years constitute the five volumes under review. These are excellent resource books for school libraries or a good addition to any child's personal library. I have, though, some reservations about the phrasing of instructions for the long questions in Volumes 4 and 5. *Making Sense of Climate Change*, for secondary students, addresses its audience in a logical fashion, informing and educating through lucid prose. The layout is attractive, with a clear print and no overcrowding on the pages. *H to O Figuring the Flow* too I imagine is for secondary students, but does not say so anywhere. The presentation, both in terms of matter and appearance leaves something to be desired. The text goes back and forth in time and space—there is a certain lack of logic and clarity in it. There is too much text on each page with too fine a print on occasion.

As for *Learning from Gandhi*—it is an excellent idea, but I think the concept has gone seriously wrong in presentation. The book starts with a brief outline of Gandhiji's life and then goes on to present his thoughts on various issues. Fair enough, but in the education of children, the most basic of tenets is to start from the familiar and then move on to the unfamiliar.

TERI Books

THE GREEN OLYMPIAD AND TERRAQUIZ, VOLS 1 TO 5
MAKING SENSE OF CLIMATE CHANGE
By Ranjana Saikia, Institute for Global Environmental Strategies, published in India by TERI, Rs. 175.00
H TO O FIGURING THE FLOW
LEARNING FROM GANDHI
Both by Ranjana Saikia, Rs. 150.00 & Rs. 45.00
JHILMIL THE BUTTERFLY
By Vijaylakshmi Nagaraj, Rs.50.00
All Level 1

FLIGHT WITH BIRDY
By Sharmila Sinha, Rs. 50.00
ANJU THE STREAM
By R.P. Subramanian, Rs. 50.00
THE TREE PARTY
By Nandini Oberoi, Rs. 50.00
SAVING THE GULMOHUR
By Nandini Oberoi, Rs. 70.00
All Level 2

SUN MAGIC
By Vijaylakshmi Nagaraj
A DROP IN THE LAKE
By R.P. Subramanian, Rs. 70.00

Pratham Books

SISTER, SISTER, WHY DON'T THINGS FALL UP?
SISTER, SISTER, WHY IS THE SKY SO BLUE?
All by Roopa Pai, Eureka Series
SISTER, SISTER, WHERE DOES THUNDER COME FROM?
SISTER, SISTER, WHERE DOES THE SUN GO AT NIGHT?
Read India
Set for Rs. 100.00

Scholastic

SAVING GRANDMA'S TREE: THE CHIPKO MOVEMENT
By Jey Manokaran, Rs. 60.00
ENVIRONMENT IN MY POCKET
By Shobhit Mahajan, Rs. 100.00
MARINE LIFE
By Aysha Rau, Rs. 150.00

It would have made much more sense to start with the sections on waste and cleanliness, which children can understand and which are here consigned to the back of the book, rather than issues like industrialization and khadi, neither of which children can relate to. Some of Gandhiji's ideas were not easy even for his followers to appreciate so how can we expect children, who are not yet accustomed to thinking in greys, to understand them sixty or seventy years later in a greatly changed world? In my view this presentation has done a disservice to Gandhiji's ideas. It would have been better to have taken up a few of his thoughts on the environment and explained their relevance to today's India in some detail. Also, whatever Gandhiji may have believed about the drinking of milk by snakes, it is surely wrong to present it in a manner that implies that snakes do, in fact, drink milk. This, as we all know now, is not correct.

I visited the TERI website, looking for some information on the other books under review, but could not find most of them. Is the decision to go into publishing books for children a recent one? Perhaps this would account for the somewhat uneven quality of the books as also the fact that the website has not kept up. The storybooks produced by TERI for younger children are delightful, particularly *The Tree Party* and *A Drop in the Lake*. In all of them, the explanation and activities at the end of each book take learning forward. However there is some unevenness of quality in the stories (some more interestingly written than others), illustrations and presentation. Why do some books have a clear bold print while others do not? The text too is difficult to read in some of the books because of the background colours. Why not have the same style as in *The Tree Party*, where the text is printed in boxes?

In the face of such a worthwhile initiative by TERI, it seems a shame to quibble, but I do have a few points: Why the full page Coke ad in the quiz book? Why are some measurements given in feet (generation gap showing!) in the book on water? Why are milk and apples classified under vegetables, also in the book on water? And why does the book on the sun tell us that it is the largest star in the galaxy?

Pratham India's Read India imprint has a very charming set of early readers called, according to their website, the Eureka series. The text has the repetition which is essential for drilling reading skills in early readers and the books are most imaginatively laid out with varying sized fonts and a text that does not always march in horizontal lines – it sometimes radiates and sometimes undulates. Most attractive! And the huge plus is that they are attractively priced as well. Pratham's website says that this series is available in seven other Indian languages. How very nice that children, other than those literate in English, can discover where thunder comes from or where the sun goes at night in a simple and accessible manner.

Scholastic is a name well known in the sphere of children's books. In this review there are only three being considered, all published in India. It is good to see that the quality of editing at Scholastic India has improved, though proofreading errors persist. The book on the Chipko Andolan is well written and facts about the movement are nicely interspersed. This and the book on marine life are part of their Environment Watch series, but you would be hard put to it to discover what the other titles are, since neither book carries any mention of them – strange indeed. Nor would you discover mention of any books on their website – about environmental watch or otherwise. (An aside about websites – the Pratham one was the most attractive and easy to navigate, TERI's does not seem to pay much attention to their children's books and Scholastic does not believe in overloading its website.) Shobhit Mahajan's little reference book on the environment has the kinds of facts that children love and is enhanced by 'What You Can Do' sections (though advice on using scrap steel instead of virgin ore seems a little misplaced in a children's book!), but I feel that it is overpriced at a hundred rupees. The book on marine life has somewhat arbitrarily selected organisms but is interesting, well written and charmingly illustrated. Here too the generation gap is showing since all measurements are in feet and inches – today's children do not understand these at all. Also, since the mudskipper's distribution is given as the coasts of Africa when even a non-marine biologist like myself knows that they can be seen quite easily in the Sundarbans, one begins to wonder how many other such details have been missed out.

To someone concerned about and interested in the environment, these books are a really welcome development. There is quite a lot happening in our schools in relation to the environment – conservation, street plays, activism in the urban environment, awareness building and so on. Why not collate some of this experience so that children in different parts of the country can share their experience with one another? This would also give them a sense of participation in the all-important matter of genuine environmental education.■

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Books-in-Brief



MOSTLY FRIENDLY, 13 GHOST STORIES.
By Rachael Macbean
Scholastic, 2006, pp. 95, Rs. 80.00

This book is a must read for any pre-teen or teenager. It is well written and uncovers the positive side of the misunderstood so called 'ghosts'. The author has put in a lot of effort in compiling these stories and among them the Santa Claus, The Talisman and Sattu Pehelwan are the best. Each of these fabulous stories has an amazing and meaningful taught and moral behind them. Every line makes the reader wonder what happens next as the stories are well written and follow a sequential link. This book provides young adults to overcome the misperception of ghosts being scary. Hats off to the author for writing immaculate stories that are just right for this age group. Kudos to the author.■

Arjun Madan, Vasant Valley School, Class VIII.

Hunting The Snark: On The Trail Of Regional Indian Science Fiction

Anil Menon

It is easy enough to find non-existent things; one simply has to look in all the wrong places. It is also easy to find ubiquitous things; like junk mail, they find you. But it is having to find snarks, the stuff that's in-between— not so few as to be non-existent and not so many as to be universal— that vexes, as Douglas Adams put it, the "tea time of the soul." Car keys, true love, good translations and the self-confident idli all fall into the vexatious category. Apparently, so does regional Indian science fiction (SF).

I say "apparently," because I only spent a few weeks in search of Indian SF authors working in regional languages. It wasn't just idle curiosity. Michael Iwoleit, chief editor of the SF e-zine *Internova*[1], was hoping to put together a special issue on Indian SF, with an emphasis on regional languages. When he learnt I'd be in India during June and July of this year, he generously volunteered my assistance.

Lewis Carroll's Snark was pursued with thimbles, care, forks and hope, as well as railway-shares, smiles and soap. My methodology was not dissimilar. Mischievous circumstance and my wallet often determined the next leg of my trajectory. If I came to a fork in the road, I frequently turned back. My interviews were informal, to say the least. This report— travel notes really— can be accused of a great many things, but thoroughness is not one of them.

Still, a travelogue belongs to the literature of first impressions, and first impressions do have their uses. So without any further apology, here are my conclusions on the state of regional Indian SF:

1. There is hardly any SF in most regional Indian languages.
2. Much of what exists is naïve, often poorly translated and/or derivative.
3. There are interesting exceptions to both (1) and (2);
4. Indian SF's prospects, far from being bleak, are quite promising.

For me, the most surprising discovery was the paucity of regional Indian SF. At the start of my trip, I had been optimistic. For example, if Debjani Sengupta is right, Indian SF began with Hemlal Dutta's Bangla work, "Rahasya" (Mystery), published in *Bigyan Darpon*, circa 1880. Bengalis have always been especially prolific. There is J. C. Bose's *Polatok Tufan* (1896) through Premendra Mitra's *Mosha* (1945) to Samit Basu's *Simoqin Prophesies* (2005). And surely, the number of regional writers working in SF could only have increased since 1880. I knew Penguin India had commissioned Vandana Singh to put together a definitive anthology of Indian SF. An online Indian magazine, *Adbhut*, started in 2003 by Dinker Charak continues to thrive; most SF e-zines are considered lucky if they last for six months. So on and so forth.

When I went to meet Jaya Bhattacharji, senior editor at Zubaan, on June 21st, I didn't particularly have regional SF on my mind. But Jaya's easy going manner encouraged conversation, as did Zubaan's cosy office in the Hauz Khas enclave, with its coir shades, worn furniture, book-stuffed walls and almost cavernous central room. I found myself confiding, unasked, a bit like Jake and Elwood in the *Blues Brothers*, I too was on a quest. I had intended to add that an armchair was to be my faithful horse and the only expected hazard was having to wade through hyperlink thickets. But I never got around to the qualifiers. Jaya began to fire off names and numbers of people who could help. It was hideously clear she expected me to work at this questing business. There was nothing for it but to buckle down and get to work. I had not been looking for information as much as expert opinion. Thanks to Jaya, I was able to sidestep that quack, Dr. Google, and talk with a lot of real experts.

I went over to the National Book Trust (NBT), but the editor I had been asked to meet wasn't in, and NBT's display room was also under renovation. I was all set to return to my hotel room, when I noticed that NBT had parked a book-mobile in front of the building. It was pleasantly surprising to see it thronged with book-hungry children, or as I call them, clients. The mobile's driver/guard/bookseller was a friendly sort, in the over-relieved manner of someone thirsting to see adults. He handed me a catalogue.

The catalogue listed perennials like Narlikar's *Journey Through The Universe* and Mulk Raj Anand's *Gora*. Then there was the stuff class-monitors like to read: books about ants, hard-working bees, India's folk art, colonial history, lives of great people, and of course, *The Story Of Rice*. A couple of titles sounded deliciously inappropriate: Dhan Gopal Mukerji's *Gay-Neck: The Story Of A Pigeon* and Qudsia Zaidi's *Begum Gulabo Mousie And Her Balloons*.

The catalogue also listed two pieces of science fiction. The first was *My Robot Robbie*, a children's book by the late Dilip Salwi, and the other was *It Happened Tomorrow*, an anthology of nineteen stories edited by Dr. Bal Phondke.

Unfortunately, the book-mobile didn't have a copy of either book. But a later session with Dr. Google, yielded some information about the anthology. For example, of its nineteen stories, seven were from Marathi, three from Bengali, three from English, three from Hindi, two from Kannada, and one from Tamil. With the exception of Jayant Narlikar (Marathi), Laxman Londhe (Marathi) and Sujatha Rangarajan (Tamil), I hadn't heard about the other authors.

It seemed a little odd that there was just one Tamil author. Rangarajan ("Sujatha" is his pen name) is enormously popular in Tamil Nadu, and his success has inspired other writers such as T. S. Balasubramanian ("Subra Balan") and Maalan Narayanan. It was also odd that there were no contributions from Malayalam. And where was the Urdu science fiction story? Or Telugu, for that matter! Hadn't Dr. Phondke heard of K. K. R. Mohan?

Of course, as David Shulman pointed out in a different context, any compilation of translations must necessarily serve as its own apology. And perhaps the truth is that, excluding a couple of languages, there is hardly any regional Indian SF.

It is not a new conclusion. For example, at the 2005 Interaction Conference in Glasgow, Jim Walker presented a paper with the title, "Urdu Science Fiction: Where is It?" In his interviews, Sujatha Rangarajan frequently bemoans the lack of modern SF. When K. K. R. Mohan died in May this year, in essence, 80-90% of Telugu SF ended with him. Uppinder Mehan, an assistant professor at Emerson, wrote a thoughtful paper in 1998 on the possible reasons for paucity of Indian SF; the paucity itself was not in question.

I heard this theme echoed time and again. When I met Dr. Nirmal Bhattacharjee, editor of *Indian Literature*, Sahitya Akademi, I asked if he had come across anything that could even remotely qualify as science fiction.

"SF? Asimov? Rockets? That sort of thing?" He looked bemused.

"Yes. But by Indians."

Dr. Bhattacharjee fell silent. It was clear that he wanted to help. His eyes scanned the stacks of books piled here and there: old friends, good friends, interesting friends, new friends... but alas, no science fiction.

Rubin D'Cruz at the NBT had been doubtful that there was any such thing as Malayalam SF. When I visited Ernakulam, Kerala a few weeks later, I went down to its famed Press Club Road and asked in several bookstores for Malayalam SF. Writers other than the renowned Malayalee authors Isaac Asimov and Arthur Clarke? No, not Harry Potter. It was hopeless. I might as well have asked for a saddle and an unicorn.

Shobhit Mahajan, perhaps the most well-informed of all the people I had met, was pessimistic about Indian SF. It wasn't that there was a lack of it. The trouble, he commented, was that so much of Indian SF was of such poor quality. He pointed out that unlike the case for South American fiction, there were few good English translations of regional Indian SF.

It is true that something like Gresham's Law does operate in genre literature: just as bad money drives out the good, bad writing swamps out the good. Thus, Trekkie pulp displaces Gene Wolfe from the bookshelves, medieval fantasy displaces Russell Hoban and the Matrix franchise novels displaces Pat Cadigan. One consequence is a reluctance of "serious" authors— Rushdie's *Grimus* come to mind— to be seen as genre writers. As Kurt Vonnegut remarked[2]:

I have been a sore-headed occupant of a file drawer labeled 'Science

Fiction' .... and I would like out, particularly since so many serious critics regularly mistake the drawer for a urinal.

Ouch.

One comfort of pessimism is that surprises tend to be pleasant. I think the pessimists are going to be pleasantly surprised. For three reasons. First, a good novel— howsoever 'goodness' may be defined— has a better chance of being published and widely read today than ever before. The entertainment pie is getting larger, and there's more pizza in every slice. But because the number of slices are also increasing at a steady clip, the percentage numbers tend to be depressing.

Second, distance is now measured in mouse clicks, not meters. Novel word-of-mouth technologies (blogs, social bookmarks, collaborative filtering, viral and syndicated feeds) are changing the way readers encounter books. It is difficult to find Sujatha Rangarajan's SF novels in a bookstore outside of Tamil Nadu, but his works are easily available online. It is especially good news for Indian fiction, given the weak distribution networks.

Third, there is a lot of really great Indian SF. Especially short stories. Pritish Nandy's *Tapan* is a story about freedom as constraint. Manjula Padmanabhan's *Sharing Air* rethinks what is meant by "the air we breathe." Premendra Mitra's *Telanopota*[3] is a Borgesian nugget, describing love's loss as a name, a fever; a place. The mosquito that Mitra's Ghanashyam Das ("Ghana-da") kills in *Mosquito* survives to haunt humankind in Amitav Ghosh's *Calcutta Chromosome*. Sujatha's *Munnikavum* is a tale written on a Moebius strip. Lovely stuff.

The real problem is that regional languages currently trap their fiction within their walls. Rita Kothari in her book, *Translating India*, carefully explains why English is liberating that creativity now being held in solitary confinement. In a multi-language setting, a *lingua franca* actually maintains variety rather than suffocating it. Shobhit's point about the lack of good translations is on the mark, but I think organizations like Katha, though they do not deal with SF at the moment, will eventually make a difference. Great stories survive their translations. Perhaps even thrive. As the alien Gorkon says[4] in Star Trek VI, "you have never experienced Shakespeare until you have read him in the original Klingon."

Perhaps the best reason for optimism are SF's fans. A SF writer does not find readers; he/she recruits colonists. Build an interesting future, and there will be no shortage of settlers. It is no accident that the top five Hollywood movies last year were all SF movies. And SF fans are notoriously active. For example, a blizzard of fan-blogs for the ghastly *Snakes On A Plane*— while it was being made— convinced New Line Cinema to increase its budget. It has been a long time since "mainstream" literature has aroused any such passion.

Truth is, though SF is a genre, it is not just a genre. SF embodies a certain zeitgeist; it re-enchants Nature by estranging the familiar and familiarizing the strange. It enables the Novel to be, well, novel. Imagine being able to begin a story, as the Australian SF writer Greg Egan did, with the lines:

"OK, he is dead. You can talk to him now."

Who could resist reading such a tale? Or, for that matter, writing one?

Indian writers have begun to imagine their own familiar estrangements. And with intriguing results. A Dilip Salwi writes a *Fire on the Moon*, and it sells an estimated 300,000 copies. A Sujatha Rangarajan comes along, and his text metamorphoses into visual magic in the hands of a Mani Ratnam. Or a Vandana Singh produces a hauntingly beautiful *Delhi*, and it ends up getting collected— SF's version of longevity— in some of the field's most prestigious anthologies.

We ain't seen nothin' yet.

Reference

1 http://www.nova-sf.de/

2 Kurt Vonnegut. *Wampeters, Foma & Granfalloons.*(Dell, 1974).

3 See Pritish Nandy's translation at: www.thedailystar.net/2004/03/13/d403132101102.htm

4 www.scifiscripts.com/scripts/StarTrek6-TheUndiscoveredCountry.txt

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Qissa-Kahani & The Art of Dastan-goi



Murtaza Danish Husain

Everyone enjoys a good story. As an adult, some stories stay with us more than others. What is it that excites us about these stories? We know the ending, we know the characters, we know the plot but they still delight us, warm our insides with a tantalizing feeling within when we hear them. Probably part of the excitement is in the process of the story unfolding, the way the plot unravels and how each knot unties itself. It is the narrative that binds us to the tale.

I am an actor and a storyteller. A friend and I are trying to revive a dead art form of storytelling called *Dastan-goi*. *Dastan* is Persian for "a story" and *go* means "to tell". Thus, *Dastan-goi* literally translated means storytelling.

The Anatomy of A Story

What is it that excites us about a good story? Every story has a structure – the beginning, the main text, and the end. An excellent analogy that describes this structure as the bait, bone and bomb[1]. This structure is almost followed universally irrespective of the medium used for presenting the story. The medium could be oral storytelling or a longish episodic narration or an anecdotal recount of an event. Medium could be written/ printed text with varying genre – short story, novel, and epic poetry. It could also be visual presentation like films and documentaries, graphic novels. Whatever the medium be, it is imperative for storytellers to have a beginning that straightaway hooks their audiences to the tale. We are competing for our audience's attention and we cannot afford to have a limp beginning. The bait has to be strong enough for them to get interested in the tale.

The bone is the plot of the story. A strong plot holds the story together. It strings the various characters and disparate elements of the tale in a strong narrative thread. Thus, we won't be heading far with an interesting beginning if our plot is not gripping.

Finally is the bomb. What really glues us to a tale is the surprise element in it. Where the tale transcends an ordinary recount of an event and comes to stay with us forever. Where it becomes *our* tale.

Oral Storytelling and Dastan-e-Amir Hamzah[2]

When I started performing *Dastans*, I began by memorizing the tales from the epic collection *Dastan-e-Amir Hamza*. Initially, it seemed an onerous task. Though I am familiar with Urdu, I still found the language tough, as it isn't the language that we use in our daily lives. It is eloquent, flourished with metaphors, poetic descriptions, heavy-duty words and fantastical word pictures. Some of the phrases are quite a tongue twister. But as I memorized more *Dastans*, I could see a pattern emerging. But before I get down to that perhaps I should introduce you to *Dastans*.

Dastans are "stories" in Persian but also refer to the narrative genre of storytelling. The tradition of storytelling has flourished in every language and in every culture. Before printing came in, oral traditions were a repository of cultures, values, literature, history, religion and knowledge. However, these traditions were not pedantic either in their approach or in the dissemination of knowledge. Learning was made easy and fun by dressing it with stories. Stories were interesting, made their point effectively, and were easy to remember. Much of the religious texts and ancient historical accounts are either in the form of stories, fables or epic poetry.

The art of oral storytelling flourished in the medieval Persian world. They had their coffee houses, market places, *sarais*, and even royal palaces jostling with ace *dastan*-narrators. Most of these *Dastangos* were influenced with and drew heavily from the epic verse *Shah Namah*[3] (The Book of Kings), circa 1010 AD. The frameworks, the narrative style, the plot structures deployed by the *Dastangos* were very similar to the one in *Shah Namah*. However, as *Dastans* evolved, they acquired an independent character. The *Dastangos* incorporated local nuances, flavours, idioms, poetry, anecdotal and cultural characteristics into the *Dastans* depending on the audience they catered to.

But among the many *Dastans* in circulation, five *Dastans* were considered principal. They were about the heroics of the Greek conqueror Alexander, the great Persian king Darius, the uncle of the Prophet Muhammed, Amir Hamzah, a legendary king called Feroze Shah and most interestingly a trickster of a humble origin called Samak, the *Ayyar*.

Of all these *Dastans*, the *Dastan-e-Amir Hamzah* is perhaps the oldest and became the most popular. These tales are built around the heroics of a character called Amir Hamzah who is part legend and part real. The fact that the figure of Amir Hamzah is a son of Abdul-Muttalib in these tales makes him the paternal uncle of the Prophet Muhammad and roots him as a real person in history. One reason for this could be to derive legitimacy for the *Dastans*.

The purpose of the *Dastans* was pure entertainment. They had no moral core. A *Dastan* has four aspects to it – *Razm*, *Bazm*, *Tilism* and *Ayyari*. *Razm* is about warfare; *Bazms* are romantic congregations for poetry, romance and wine; *Tilism* is magic, fantasy – it could be external as the one that is visible to the eyes or it could be internal, hallucination; and finally *Ayyari* is trickery, spying, deceit. One would often find characters on the righteous side indulging in all these aspects and some of them, like drinking wine, free sex, cross-dressing, are absolutely un-Islamic in their nature. The *Dastangos* perhaps anticipated trouble for their art and thus linked their fictional Amir Hamzah to the historical Amir Hamzah to derive legitimacy for their storytelling. Though we find much restrain for the *Dastans* in the popular culture right up till the Victorian age when prudish values set in the world over.

The other Amir Hamzah is linked to the legendary Persian monarch Nausherwan. As per the legend, Nausherwan had a troubling dream. He sought his gifted astrologer Vizier Buzurchmeher's counsel. The Vizier interpreted the dream as Nausherwan losing his kingdom for a while before a young Arab called Amir Hamzah will come and help him to restore the order. Nausherwan immediately sends out emissaries to Arabia to find out this boy. Once Amir Hamzah is traced the Persian court commissions his upbringing and ensures all privileges are provided to him. However, in his heart Nausherwan fears Amir Hamzah and one of his ministers, Vizier Bakhtak, capitalizes on this fear and instigates Nausherwan against Amir Hamzah. But Amir Hamzah's friend and chief trickster, Amar Ayyar, is there with him throughout this entire ordeal and at each stage wards off Bakhtak's fiendish attempts to harm Amir Hamzah.

But the Persian Amir Hamzah is possibly the flamboyant *Kharijite*[4] rebel who led an insurrection against Abbasid[5] caliph Harun al-Rashid[6] and his successors. The two Amir Hamzahs lived in distinct periods. The Prophet's uncle existed around late 6th century-early 7th century AD, while the *Kharijite* rebel existed around early 9th century AD. The Persian *Dastan*-narrators mixed these two historical personalities and incorporated him in the fictional tales of *Dastans* where he fights kings, devils, djinns who assert godhood and thus challenge Allah's supremacy.

However, the embellishments each *Dastan*-narrator adorned the *Dastans* with blossomed with spaces where they narrated their *Dastans*. The *Dastan-e-Amir Hamzah* spread far and wide and there Japanese and Malay versions of it have been recorded. The *Dastans* were "performed". "Recitation" doesn't do any justice to the delivery of *Dastans*, from Morocco to Indonesia. There are historical accounts of *Dastan* being performed in Tehran and in Turkish coffee houses of Azerbaijan. There is a bazaar in Peshawar called Bazaar-e-Qissakhwani, which is exclusively for storytelling.

But the region where the *Dastan-e-Amir Hamzah* flourished, perhaps most, was India. As Lucknow became the center for literary and cultural activities in the 19th century India, *Dastangos* also found a performing haven there. Some time in early 20th century Munshi Nawal Kishore, a reputed publisher, got most *Dastangos* in Lucknow together and transcribed their stories. We do not know what was the modus operandi for transcribing these *Dastans*. Did the *Dastangos* perform or did they flatly recite? But all the *Dastans* were recorded and saw a print existence. Though Akbar[7] in early years of his reign had commissioned a mammoth project called *Hamza-namah*[8], an artwork consisting of 1400 canvas folios that had paintings on

one side and Hamzah tales on the other, but Munshi Nawal Kishore's effort would truly be the first one to give the *Dastans* a published life.

The Art of Dastan-goi

Let's revert to the patterns I was referring to. After reading and memorizing around six *Dastans*, I realized there was a technique to it. We may call them devices that the *Dastangos* deployed in practising their art form.

The first one is the repertoire of words, phrases, descriptions, and poetry ensembles that they had stocked over a lifetime of performances. We'd often see them being repeated in *Dastans*. A *Dastango* would draw from this stock while narrating tales. What we need to understand is that the *Dastangos* didn't memorize *Dastans* verbatim. Most of their performances were extemporaneous and improvised. They'd gauge the mood of their audience and expand or contract, add or delete from the *Dastans* given the reception to their performance. Thus the literary repertoire came very handy. Of course, each *Dastango* had his or her (yes, there were female *Dastangos* too) own strength. Some were better at warfare, some were hilarious and had *Dastans* stacked with humour, others were adept at interspersing their *Dastans* with poetry. Let me take the liberty of quoting generously from Frances W. Pritchett's work[9] about a description of a *Dastan* evening by Mir Baqir Ali, the last and the legendary *Dastango* of the subcontinent.

The performance takes place in Mir Baqir Ali's house. Some visiting gentlemen from Lucknow, where Dastan-narration is still popular, have come to hear "a Delhi-style Dastan"; there is an air of patronizing antiquarianism in their interest, since in Delhi Dastan-narration has fallen on hard times. Mir Baqir Ali takes a cup of a marijuana preparation and a cup of tea, then sits back on his heels and prepares to recite. After two introductory verses in Persian, he begins:

> The most humble one presents this delightful Dastan from the point at which the *daftars Kochak bakhtar* (The Lesser West) and *Bala bakhtar* (The Upper West) have ended, and the luckless Laqa, expelled from the court of Zumurrud Shah of Bakhtar, has fled from combat with his Worship the Wealth-winning, World illuminating Sun, the Planet-brightening Moon of the Sultanate of Bahirah, the Chastiser of the Arrogant of the World, the Highly-respected Ruler, the Revered and Auspicious Lord of Arabia and Persia [i.e., Amir Hamzah]; and many arrogant ones have already bent their proud heads at his fortunate door.
>
> In this time of joyful outcome, it happens one day that in the midst of the Palace of Solomon, the World-sustaining Court is being held. One or two hundred dancers, producers of pleasure, are in attendance. The *tablah* is being played. The trill of the *sarangi* and the deep tones of the drum reach to the skies. Various kinds of musical instruments—[here twenty-five kinds are named]—are being played. The rosy cup-bearers, bringing wine-flasks and cups, are stealing away men's senses...

At this point occurs the first of a number of breaks in Subuhi's transcription. Of the whole amount of text which he does provide, almost half consists of elaborate descriptive material like that quoted above. There are catalogues: champions' names; wild animals; boats; wrestling equipment (nineteen kinds named); wrestling holds (forty-three kinds named); Amar Ayyar's appearance and equipment. There are lengthy, sensuous, set-piece descriptions: a country scene in the monsoon season, a group of lovely Pari maidens, the Pari princess herself. There is ornamental verse, inserted freely and supplemented by many sets of doubled descriptive phrases sharing rhythm and end-rhyme. The effect is rich, ornate, self-consciously poetic.

The other device the Dastangos used was the incorporation of theatrical techniques like mimicry in their performances. Dastangoi is a tightrope walk between narration and dramatization. While maintaining a semblance of narration they'd often resort to performance in order to enhance their characters. Dastangos didn't just tell stories they created word pictures. They would often construct a hyper-reality where audiences would flow in and flow out based on the strength of their individual imagination. The descriptions acquired larger than life, often awe-inspiring, mythical existence for each member of the audience. Thus, when Mir Baqir Ali described an old woman, he'd seem like one and when he'd describe a powerful warrior he'd seem like that too to his audience and all this when he was a gauntly built short-statured man.

The third device is the plot itself of the tale. I once heard that there are only 8 or 9 basic plots in the world. Every plot derives from these basic plots or any such combination of them. The storytelling in Dastans is rather simple. There is a set of righteous people defending the faith fighting against a set of evil, diabolical people who wish to destroy the faith. Amir Hamzah leads the righteous people where there is an ensemble of evil characters, the chief being Laqa, a powerful wily king who has proclaimed godhood. The hero is not alone. He has a lieutenant and a confidant in his friend Amar Ayyar. In most tales the hero or his aide are underdogs to begin with. They're facing a mighty opponent. The tale would begin with a series of incidents that trap them and then how they, the hero and his aide, extricate themselves out of these situations and become victorious in the end. The Dastangos would use this basic framework or variations of it and hang their tales on them. They unravelled the whole plot on the principle of "what happens next?" And that was the reason why they had their audiences hooked to their tales forever.

The Dastangos used all the above mentioned devices and created magic session after session.

One finds Dastans seeped in medieval Islamic culture but that is incidental. That stems from the fact that Dastangos belonged to a certain culture, milieu. But they are very secular in their narration. The good and the bad are evenly matched and often we find the good winning more out of an obligation that the Dastango has to the sensibilities of his audience.

Dastangoi is perhaps the only art form where a littérateur, an author, a poet and a performer are combined into one. An ideal setting where literature is married to performance.

So, next time when you attend a session of Dastangoi it's not about stories alone. You're witnessing heritage.■

Reference

1 The source is here http://geocities.com/jmp_storytelling/threeparts.htm for those interested.

2 I have drawn heavily from Frances W. Pritchett's work. You may find the link here: http://en.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00litlinks/hamzah/index.html

3 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shahnameh

4 For Kharijites http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kharijite

5 For Abbasid Dynasty http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abbasid

6 For Harun al-Rashid http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harun_al-Rashid

7 For Akbar http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akbar

8 For Hamza-namah http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamzanama

9 For the complete version click here: http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00litlinks/hamzah/intro4_oral.pdf

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Books-in-Brief



WHY THE WAGTAIL IS SO TINY AND OTHER FOLK TALES?
By Meera Uberoi
Scholastic, 2006, pp. 73, Rs. 85.00

Why is the Wagtail So Tiny, and Other Folk Tales? is a delightful book full of short folk tales from all around India, written by Meera Uberoi. Whether it's about 'The Crows Daughter', a tale from Kashmir or 'A Cure for a King', a tale from Bihar, they all have something new to teach us about the values of life. Taking the most told folk tales from twelve different states in India, Meera Uberoi has made an entrancing collection of short stories, for all ages. This books is great to read when you are waiting at the doctor's or going on a long drive or just relaxing at home. This beautifully illustrated book is destined to be a bestseller, so buy it before the bookshops don't have it in stock anymore!

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Sudhanva Deshpande



MASKS AND PERFORMANCE WITH EVERYDAY MATERIALS
By Gita Wolf, V. Geetha, Anushka Ravishankar
Tara Publishing, Chennai, 2006, pp. 143, price not stated.

We are forever surrounded by masks. The kathakali dancer in performance; the goalkeeper in hockey; the rescue worker at a collapsed building site; the traffic policeman at a busy, polluted intersection; the football fan with painted face; the robber at a bank heist; the surgeon at work; and even a heavily made-up Page 3 socialite—they all use masks of one kind or another. Some of these masks are functional and are meant to protect the wearer from hazards. The hockey goalkeeper, rescue worker, traffic policeman, and surgeon fall in this category. Others erase the identity of the wearer—the football fan and the robber. Then there are those which help you assume a totally different identity—the kathakali dancer falls in this category, and some would include the Page 3 socialite as well!

Most of us have taken part in some kind of dramatic activity as children. That thrill, of temporarily shedding our own and assuming another identity, of being transported to a fantasy world, is virtually unparalleled. This thrill is magnified with masks. The moment you wear a mask, you can almost literally *feel* your face changing contours, you can feel your walk and mannerisms transforming, you can feel the blood surge in your veins. It is no surprise, therefore, that some of the most vigorously athletic and martial dances across the world are done with masks—the purulia chhau being a good example.

The present book introduces the world of masks to the lay reader, especially young adolescents. The book is an outcome of a workshop done in Chennai with a group of 12-year-old working class children, four traditional mask makers, and a theatre director. From the account of the workshop in the book, it was clearly quite rigorous while being fun and a huge learning experience for both the children as well as, one suspects, the mask makers. The children observed the mask makers at work, and were free to ask questions and learn from them. But the idea was not to teach the children 'traditional' techniques of mask making, rather to introduce them to the world of masks, and equally to get them to observe how much knowledge, skill, and hard work went into the making of masks. The children made their own masks, often quite different from the mask makers, and then created a play around the masks, with guidance from the theatre director. The book is accordingly divided into two parts, one about the mask making workshop, and the other about the play making process.

The first thing that strikes you as you open the book is that it is beautifully illustrated. As you start reading, you realize that it is extremely well-written as well, with clarity and humour: 'If you find the white face too ghostly, you can paint it green and make it ghastly.' The book also has cartoons around the theme of masks, and they are a delight: one shows a gang of burglars taking off their masks to disguise themselves from the police, and another has an actor showing surprise by raising his eyebrows—while he has a mask on! The activities listed are fun, and many of the masks are of the type that most older adolescents or adults can attempt on their own, without a trained hand to guide them. Some, however, seem a little more difficult—for instance, the cow mask, where you are supposed to make a mould of wet clay over a base made of bricks. But I am caviling, the book is a joy to look at, read, and explore.

Only one point: while the book does not mention a price, it is clearly quite expensively produced, and therefore, one fears, somewhat steeply priced.■

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Books-in-Brief

Books-in-Brief

BAWRE BEEJ (HINDI)
By Vishakha Chanchani
Tulika in association with Navdanya, Rs. 50.00

Not so long ago there was a programme on television about how and why children do not enjoy Hindi. This book is an example of that. In format and layout, as well as going by the indication on the back cover, you would think that it is meant for 5-7 year-olds. The Hindi teacher I consulted said that she would find it extremely difficult to explain some of the ideas contained in the poem to children of Class IV and below. Thus, a parent could buy this for a younger child in the belief that it is suitable, but of course a younger child cannot read it and would not understand it if it is read to her. What a turn-off! We also had a problem with the title – seeds may be 'bawre' in that they lodge and take root in cracks of buildings, but they are not 'bawre' when we plant them, which the child is urged to do. Another example of adults being unable to think at the level of the child.

Moneesha Sharma is a school teacher who has written activity-based concept development textbooks for young children.

Shobhana Bhattacharji



FRAMED
By Frank Cottrell Boyce
Macmillan Children's Books, London, 2005, pp. 312, UK£9.99, CND $19.99

ALYZON WHITESTARR
By Isobelle Carmody
Penguin, 2005, pp. 584, Rs.395.00

BILLY THUNDER AND THE NIGHT GATE
THE GATHERING
THE WINTER DOOR: VOLUME TWO OF THE GATEWAY TRILOGY
All by Victoria Camberwell,
Puffin, 2000, 1993, 2003, pp. 303, 265, 455, Rs. 395.00 each

FLY BY NIGHT
By Frances Hardinge
Macmillan Children's Books, London, 2005, pp. 312, UK£12.99, CND $26.95

STORMBREAKER
By Anthony Horowitz
Walker Books, London, 2005, pp. 236, £6.99

ATTICA
By Garry Kilworth,
Atom, an imprint of Time Warner Book Group UK, 2006, pp. 334, Penguin India, £3.99

THE WIND TAMER
By P.R.Morrison,
Bloomsbury, London, 2006, pp. 336, Penguin India, £4.99

THE DEATH COLLECTOR
By Justin Richards
Faber, London, 2006, pp. 320, Penguin India, £6.99

PERCY JACKSON AND THE LIGHTNING THIEF
By Rick Riordan
Puffin, London, 2005, price not stated.

PERCY JACKSON AND THE SEA OF MONSTERS
Puffin, London, 2005, pp. 265, price not given.

SEPTIMUS HEAP, BOOK TWO: FLYTE
By Angie Sage. Illustrated by Mark Zug
Bloomsbury, London, 2006, pp. 521, Penguin India, £4.99

KILLERS OF THE DAWN: THE SAGA OF DARREN SHAN, BOOK 9
By Darren Shan
HarperCollins, London, 2003, pp. 184, HarperCollins India, £2.99

TUNNELS OF BLOOD: THE SAGA OF DARREN SHAN, BOOK 3
HarperCollins, London, 2000, pp.166,HarperCollins India, £2.99

ENDYMION SPRING
By Matthew Skelton,
Puffin, London, 2006, pp. 444, Penguin India, £2.99

THE EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURES OF ALFRED KROPP
By Rick Yancy,
Bloomsbury, London, 2006, pp. 339, Penguin India £2.99

Fantasy, time travel, sci-fi, adventure, and Parallel Worlds, summed up by a literary historian as "counter factual time-line fantasies,"[1] recur in this year's pile, with a little whimsy added (*Attica*, a Rider Haggard-like adventure in an attic). There are two retellings of Greek mythology (Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson novels, the best fiction I've read for a long time), one of the Arthurian legend (Rick Yancy, O such a falling off after Riordan), a Faust story (Matthew Skelton), and a James Bond (Anthony Horowitz). These retellings of myths and legends are distinguished from the Parallel Worlds tales in being adaptations of specific myths and legends. A boy—it's a boy in each one—encounters mythical figures via magic. Except for the Australian Isobelle Carmody, all the books are from Britain. Historical or quasi-historical fiction has been on the rise since 1970, but the recent increase in such fiction for children is new and, Suzanne Keen believes, directly proportional to the de-emphasizing of history from the British school curriculum. The 1980s were the innovative phase for the old genre of historical novels, when post-modern uncertainties were emphasized in experimental styles and mixed genres, telling stories about the past "that point to multiple truths or the overturning of old received Truth [and adopting] a parodic or playful attitude to history over an ostensibly normative mimesis."[2]

A new genre in recent children's fiction is books about books. In *Endymion Spring* and *The Death Collector*, books are the source of power and the focus of conspiracies. *Endymion Spring* is even set in the library of an Oxford college. A lovely passage in it echoes of Borges's *The Library of Babel*:[3]

> The pages [of the magic diary] were no longer blank, but covered in minute panels of words that opened like invisible doors the moment his eyes fell on them, leading him into different stories, different languages . . .each a stairwell of paper taking him on a new adventure. Every now and then they froze, stopping in mid-sentence, on the verge of revealing an amazing truth, and he leaped to a new entry.

Going by these voluminous volumes, series are trendy. We have No.2. of Angie Sage's Septimus Heap trilogy, Nos. 1-2 of Isobelle Carmody's *Gateway* trilogy, and 2 and 9 of the Darren Shan lot about a good vampire with divided loyalties, both ending with "To be continued" and that straggle of dots derided by Somerset Maugham who ended his stories with full stops. *Stormbreaker* (2000) is the first of Anthony Horowitz's Alex Rider series, this one about a really fast computer invented by a man who wants to destroy England because the PM, a Tony Blair figure, taunted him in school. The best are Rick Riordan's tales of Percy Jackson and the Olympians. In the first, dyslexic young Percy (short for Perseus) discovers that he is the son of Poseidon, therefore a half-blood and hero. He must find the master thunderbolt that has been stolen from Zeus who accuses Poseidon of having swiped it. He meets Hades, the nastiest of the three Olympian brothers, and takes a trip to Mount Olympus (you take the Empire State building lift to the 600th floor) to return Zeus's masterbolt. Boyce's *Framed* is the lone adventure in real life.

Frank Cottrell Boyce's hilarious *Framed*, with its wild caste of characters, is about the Hughes family who run a petrol pump in a dying Welsh village but are willing to do anything to make ends meet. One day, the National Gallery in flooded London has to be emptied of its paintings, which are stored in a disused slate mine above the petrol pump, and the Team Hughes commits the perfect crime.

Isobelle Carmody's *Alyzon Whitestarr* starts at top speed and never lets up, as T.S.Eliot almost said of a Jacobean dramatist.

> "A man and woman walked from their car down the steep curving road to the sea. . . . There was a naked pregnant woman, waist deep in the sea."

The protagonist accidentally becomes a synaesthetist who can smell people's feelings and see their memories. She discovers there's a disease of the spirit rapidly spreading through the world. As in the other Carmody stories, here too there's an ugly secret brotherhood of violence whose existence few will acknowledge until it bursts forth with fearsome power. An allegory of our times.

The Gathering: Why send a 1993 book for review? The film with a screenplay by Anthony Horowitz is scheduled for release in 2007, but the book doesn't say so. *The Gathering* centres upon the idea that evil is often initiated by adults. A Hitlerian schoolteacher organizes students into an obedient group (the Gathering of the title), which terrorizes anyone who is different. Ghastly violence is also perpetrated by the schoolteacher who knows that in the unequal balance of power between children and adults, the word of adults prevails even when they lie. It's a grim world where evil is a continuation of Nazism, which Carmody shows to be present in everyone but when it gets organized under a despotic leader, it becomes extremely powerful. Reading *The Gathering* as Israel bombs Lebanon while the US continues to train its sites on Iran and its deadly incompetence in Iraq

drags on—I'm writing this on 13 August 2006— Hitler seems to have been outflanked. The arch demon now is uncontrolled power. Nicholas's mother tells him as much. Like Thomas Hardy, Carmody has done away with God but the idea of God remains. *The* Gathering and *The* Chain (precious terms) are really the Judaeo-Christian Satan and God. Carmody, a Tolkein admirer, attempts a Tolkein-like mythology, except that since her story's setting is a more real world than that of *The Lord of the Rings*, its evil is more terrifying. The book is framed by the rapidly changing categories for children's books. A gold sticker on the front cover classifies it as a book for "older readers," an advertisement at the back calls it "teenage fiction." *Young Adult* wasn't in use in 1993. The powerful cover illustration by Anne Spudvilas is dominated by a fine-featured young boy, presumably Nathaniel. If the original painting is still available, I'd like to have it.

The protagonist of *Billy Thunder and the Night Gate* is a young girl called Rage, which is not her real name but short for Courage; Billy Thunder is her favourite dog. Like *The Gathering*, *Billy Thunder* is also about the children of violent relationships who find it difficult to make friends. It stands on the shoulders of a single giant, *Alice in Wonderland.* Rage falls through a hole in the ground and has adventures, the nicest of which is that her dogs and her neighbour's goat become human-like and share her exploits. As humans, they can think and remember things; as animals they live in the moment and are always joyful. When Billy Thunder returns to the real world, he can understand all that Rage says to him though he can't speak to her. Unlike Alice, Rage has a quest. Her mother is in a coma, the doctors have given up hope, but Rage goes through the Night Gate to find the wizard who will help cure her mother, which he does and doesn't. The story exists on the threshold of reality and fantasy, a good setting for children's fiction. *The Winter Door*, a bit long drawn out, carries on smoothly from where *Billy Thunder* ended.

Frances Hardinge's *Fly by Night* is a Lesser Tolkein, if that's possible. This has anthropomorphized insects and made up names, i.e., not taken from our world, even though there's a Mosca whom I am inclined to like for saying, "I don't want a happy ending. I want more story." A platter of cakes watches over human beings ("when we married your parents…"). Nice cover, good print. Hardinge studied English at Oxford so watch out for witty allusions.

Horowitz calls his racy, neatly funny *Stormbreaker* a modern "teenager saves the world" story. "When the doorbell rings at 2 in the morning it is never good news." And it isn't. Alex Rider's travelling salesman uncle and guardian has been killed in a car crash, only it turns out he was an MI5 spy, and now MI5 wants to employ Alex to outwit the villainous creator of Stormbreaker. The young Horowitz was addicted to James Bond films but felt that to be really cool, Bond should have been 14 years old. "I genuinely think that 14-year-olds are the coolest people on the planet. It's a wonderful, golden age, just on the cusp of manhood when everything seems possible," he says, and Alex is a wonderful, golden creature. Not a pimple mars his face, not an awkward hair stands up on his scalp, he is never at a loss for words, he never blushes, and he has "serious eyes" rather than the bewildered/defiant eyes of most 14-year-olds. Just the hero to save the world.

In Garry Kilworth's *Attica* three children are sent adventuring into an attic by the previous owner of the house who asks them to locate a silver watch gifted to him by his ex-fiancé. The attic, which unnervingly extends itself in many directions, is full of strange creatures, terrors, and helpers. The children, who are nice anyway, emerge as better human beings and make the reader feel shiny new in the process, a quality I thought children's books had lost forever.

In a cold, windy Scottish fishing village, 10-year-old Archie's strange faraway Uncle Rufus gifts him an old watch, a single gold coin, and a battered dagger which his mother won't let him see. Mysterious things happen any way in *The Wind Tower* by P.R. Morrison. A mythical bird visits Archie and soon thereafter Rufus himself arrives to help him tame the wind and destroy the family curse. I like stories set in Scotland; I liked this one very much.

Justin Richards' *The Death Collector* is another gothic story involving time travel and a dangerous book a lot of people are after. The book is the last diary of Sir Henry Glick, palaeontologist and geologist, who found a way to bring dinosaurs . . . but before he can reveal his discovery at an 1853 New Years Eve dinner, he dies. It has a terrific opening line: "Four days after his own funeral, Albert Wilkes came home for tea." The rest of it is as good. A lovely product, with Victorian-looking dark green covers and endpapers carrying drawings of machines. Justin Richards is famous for BBC TV's sci-fi Dr.Who series.

The premise of Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson and The Lightning Thief* and *Percy Jackson and the Sea of Monsters*, the best versions of the Greek myths since Robert Graves, is that the gods cannot die but relocate to wherever the world's power is. Currently they are in the US, specifically Manhattan. After World War 2, which was caused by the gods, it was agreed that they would have no more children by mortal partners, but some of them have had children, among whom is Percy Jackson (13) who learns he must prevent World War 3, which is imminent because the three egotistical and touchy brothers, Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades are at loggerheads over the stolen master bolt. Riordan captures the spirit of the myths perfectly, his adaptation is bizarrely clever, the insights constant (e.g., the idea of the Internet came from Hermes, the divine messenger). In *The Sea of Monsters*, Perseus Jackson is on a quest to save his satyr friend Grover who has been hidden away near Florida.

"The probable, the marvellous-taken-as-fact, the marvellous-known-to-fiction—such is the triple equipment of the post-Renaissance poet. Such were the three worlds which Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton were born to. . . . But this triple heritage is a late conquest. Go back to the beginnings of any literature and you will not find it. At the beginning the only marvels are the marvels which are taken for fact. . . . The old gods, when they ceased to be taken as gods, might so easily have been suppressed as devils. . . . Only their allegorical use, prepared by slow developments within paganism itself, saved them, as in a temporary tomb, for the day when they could wake again in the beauty of acknowledged myth and thus provide modern Europe with its `third world' of romantic imagining. . . . The gods must be, as it were, disinfected of belief; the last taint of the sacrifice, and of the urgent practical interest, the selfish prayer, must be washed away from them, before that other divinity can come to light in the imagination. For poetry to spread its wings fully, there must be, besides the believed religion, a marvellous that knows itself as myth.

When we sit down to write a romance, then, we make up elves and ghosts and wraiths and wizards, in whom we don't believe but in whom we enclose our most urgent feelings, and we demand that the world they inhabit be consistent and serious."[4]

Angie Sage's *Flyte* is as delightful as its predecessor *Magyk*,[5] with good witches and a detective who used to be tennis ball. Mark Zug's illustrations are as precise and evocative.

Author and protagonist have the same name in Darren Shan's *Tunnels of Blood* and *Killers of the Dawn* which takes the shan off tedious arguments whether persona and author can be one. Vampires don't turn me on but they're obviously popular with someone. This series is about to run into two figures.

In Matthew Skelton's *Endymion Spring* is Gutenberg's printer's devil. Printers devils were the young boys with nimble fingers and sharp eyes who helped early printers set the wooden type. Gutenberg dreamt of printing the Bible, and was financed by Johann Fust, supposed author of the *Faustbuch* who gave rise to the Faust legend. The Fust of this tale finds magic paper which Endymion Spring steals from him to write a diary which he conceals in the library of an Oxford college where a couple of American children find it centuries later. What a 12-year old and his sister learn about Endymion and how the story of books is told is the meat of this tale, spiced with Gothic horror, suspense, a little magic, and a racy style.

Walter Scott's great innovation of telling history like a story was adopted by historians, but from the 20h century historians and storytellers parted ways. Serious people looked down upon the early twentieth century historical novel (Jean Plaidy, Georgette Heyer, Margaret Irwin, Mary Renault) in the way that action films are looked down upon today. But we seem to be back in a situation close to the early 19th century when Scott ruled book sales. There's a neo-literate readership that hasn't read much which apparently

has to be tempted with stories to return to books.

In Rick Yancy's *The Extraordinary Adventures of Alfred Kropp*, King Arthur's sword Excalibur is stolen by the bad guys and recovered by young Alfred Kropp. The main characters are descended from the original Arthurian gang. *Alfred Kropp* is too wordy with too little imagination. It's any old boys' adventure story with a few names from the Arthurian legends and some archaisms thrown in. The trick for such stories to succeed is to know the original really well, then combine it with modern stories of adventure and horror into a really good and-then narrative. Riordan's account of myths is flawless, but not Yancy's. Alfred Kropp bones up on the Arthurian legends from T.H.White's *Once and Future King* and the film *Excalibur* from which he learns that Arthur had a half brother called Fey. Fey? No. Actually his half brother was Kay. Morgan La Faye was another character altogether, of a different gender to Sir Kay and far nastier. How did Bloomsbury let this pass? The paper, print, and stingy margins remind me of cheap, forgettable thrillers of the 1950s and 60s.

All the books are for 9-year-olds and above and, barring Carmody's, are feel-good stories from mainstream publishers. It would be good to read alternative literature from independent presses.

Reference

[1] Suzanne Keen, "The Historical Turn in British Fiction," *A Concise Companion to Contemporary British Fiction*, ed. James F.English (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 167-187, 168.

[2] Keen 171.

[3] For an illustration of Borge's work, see <http://jubal.westnet.com/hyperdiscordia/library_of_babel.html> accessed 11. 9. 2006.

[4] C.S.Lewis, quoted in Adam Gopnik, "Prisoner of Narnia: How C. S. Lewis Escaped" <http://www.newyorker.com/printables/critics/051121crat_atlarge> Accessed 18. 8. 2006. See <http://www.rickriordan.com/gods_and_magic.htm> for Riordan on fundamentalist views of his books. See also <http://www.rickriordan.com/author.htm> both accessed 9.9. 2006.

[5] Reviewed in *The Book Review*, November 2005.

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Lakshana N. Palat

THE SMALL TIGERS OF SHERGARH
By Ranjit Lal
Indiaink an imprint of Roli Books, Delhi, 2006,
pp. 343, Rs. 395.00

THE SUMMER ADVENTURE
THE HIDDEN TREASURE
THE ONLY WITNESS
By Shashi Deshpande
Puffin Books, 2006, pp 379, Rs. 295

These two books revolve around a common theme which is—adventure. In both the books the characters have immense desire for action. In the book *The Small Tigers of Shergarh*, the sweet and 'correct girl' Shikha and her brother Sunny are orphaned at a young age. Their parents die in a terrible car crash, and they survive, much to everyone's surprise. The accident has a awful effect on Sunny, as he is unable to talk due to the shock.

Binoy Chacha, who is not at all keen on adopting 'two in shock kids', adopts Shikha and Sunny. He doesn't talk much to them, and keeps out of their way most of the time. He forbids them from coming down into his studio, which sets fire to Shikha's curiosity as she starts wondering what possibly could he be hiding down there.

> 'Chacha, where do you do your painting?' she asked.
>
> 'In my studio.' He replied shortly. 'It is down there.' He pointed towards one end of the garden where steps led down the cliff. Shikha leaned forward to look. A long shed like structure clung to the steep cliff side, huge glass windows facing the park and with skylights in its roof.
>
> 'Oh,' she said. 'It looks like an exciting place!'
>
> 'You're not to go down there!' (p. 14)

The field director's daughter Dipti encourages Shikha to go to the Jungle everyday, with Aslambhai the driver, and his mischievous grandson Ali. The reader is taken through the wonderful tour of the jungle, and it appears quite real to the reader—the beauty of the tigers, the enjoyable experience of getting soaked in mud and a lot more.

Shikha's fun is spoilt when the scheming Veena Auntie comes to take over, and insists that Shikha should be separated from Sunny, and plans on sending her to a boarding school. Veena Auntie's cruelty is shown when she puts sleeping tablets in Sunny 's milk to make him sleep heavily so that she could take him without his creating a noise by screaming. The plan is foiled when Shikha comes to hear of it. She takes matters into her hands and runs away with Sunny. And then, the story is fraught with danger, hilarity and seriousness.

The story is a marvelous piece of work. It delicately lays stress on the fact that we must save tigers, and stop killing them. After reading the story, a sense of love for tigers is instilled in the readers. The main tigers in the story are Shahenshah, the king of the jungle (even more lovable as he gives Veena Auntie a good scare!), the fierce Sheba, and Shaitan.

The characters undergo quite a change by the end of the story. Sunny learns to talk, Binoy Chacha becomes more affectionate, and doesn't seem so distant anymore, and Shikha learns more about the animals around her.

In the three novels by Shashi Deshpande, we see four totally different characters—Dinu who is the eldest and extremely adventurous, Ravi, his cousin who is exactly like Dinu, the fat and jolly Minu whose real name is Minakshi, and last is the happy and cheerful Polly whose real name is Aruna.

In *The Summer Adventure*, Dinu, Minu and Polly first meet Ravi who is quite standoffish and sulky. This part of the story is quite similar to Famous Five, where George is the unfriendly cousin they have to meet.

Soon the four become fast friends. On the first day of Ravi 's visit, they learn about a string of audacious robberies, which have occurred in their town, and they immediately try to solve it before the police do. Most of the adventures the children have, remind the reader of Enid Blyton's Famous Five and the Secret Seven.

The next story *The Hidden Treasure*, the four cousins end up spending their Diwali Holiday in their Uncle's farm in the village. The have a lot of fun in the village, especially when they discover a broken down ancestral mansion to explore. The adventure and mystery start from here itself, when they realize that someone has been digging away in the mansion at night to look for an entire fortune their ancestors had buried. The mysteries churn and twist and lead to unbelievable conclusions.

In the last novel *The Witness*, Dinu, Minu and Polly visit Bombay and spend the summer with Ravi. There they make new friends, one of whom claims to have seen the face of a bank robber. Soon after, a spate of robberies breaks out all over Bombay. The children suspect that it is the same gang at work. Then one of their close friends is kidnapped, and again the children find themselves in the midst of a thrilling mystery.

The one feature common between all three stories is that in some places the reader tends to lose interest, and the story appears to drag on. The ending is always interesting, but prolonged and most of the time does not produce the desired suspense-filled effect.

Out of the two books, I enjoyed *The Small Tigers at Shergarh* much more, as there was not a single dull moment and was always packed with action. It did not drag on, and did not have irrelevant dialogues like the other three novels.■

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When Fans Take Over Fiction



Payal Dhar

Have you ever wondered what would happen if Harry Potter was not the "chosen one"? Do you ever imagine what happened to the Five Find-Outers once they grew up? Will the Dragon Reborn successfully face up to the Dark One to keep the Wheel of Time turning? Do you refuse to believe that Mulder and Scully are finished with the X-Files? Are you convinced that the Friends will all get back together? Could you imagine what would happen if Superman and Bertie Wooster took up residence in 221 Baker Street?

If you answered yes to any of the above, have you done anything about it? Many others have!

Enter the fascinating world of fan fiction. Very simply, it can be described as unauthorized, uncommissioned works of fiction written by fans based on characters and 'realities' owned and created by other people, be it books, TV serials, movies or comics.

Fiction Within Fiction

While it would be gravely erroneous to portray it as a modern phenomenon, there is no doubt that the Internet has given it a new lease of life. It stands as an entire literary genre in its own right, despite being a controversial subject, hailed and hindered equally by authors whose works have been taken off on.

Most authors are in general fairly well disposed—or even indifferent—to fan fiction; yet others are fanatically opposed to it. J.K. Rowling has gone on record saying that while she is flattered that her readers would want to write about Harry and his friends, some of their more graphic antics portrayed in the annals of fan fiction have horrified her.

So, to come to the big question: Why do people write fan fiction? Wouldn't a "real" writer want to create his or her own world and characters? Is it a form of laziness? Or is it a reader's way of acknowledging an author for producing an engaging and enduring work? Or is it simply a hobby indulged in for entertainment?

Off-and-on fan fiction writer Marie Concholar, now in her early 20s, has been dabbling in it since high school. Now a creative writing student at the University of Arizona, Tucson, she admits that she writes fanfic "to explore weird or creative ideas inside a world I enjoy reading about".

And that, really, sums up the motivation of any fan fiction writer. All of us have, at some point of time or another, finished a book or sat through the final episode of a TV serial and said, "Hey, it can't end here! I want to know what happens next!" Or thought, "Oh, but that's so wrong! He should have got together with the other one!" Quite like what Concholar says: "I like to write stories dealing with the children of the main characters of the series, because there's a good chance as a reader I'll never get to see that from the author."

Hacked and Slashed

Fan fiction—or fanfic, as many like to shorten it—has no rules, no limits. It is the ultimate free run in someone else's yard. Imagine Aragorn meeting Luke Skywalker in present-day Mumbai. Imagine Malory Towers' schoolgirls sucked into *NYPD Blue*. Imagine Buffy the Vampire Slayer married to Angel, chuckling over their grandchildren. Imagine that Meggie and Father Ralph eloped...

The mind truly does boggle. Take a look at any fan fiction website for the number of categories into which submissions are accepted. Fanfiction.net, one of the most popular fanfic archives in cyberspace, classifies work according to: anime/manga, books, cartoons, comics, games, movies and TV shows, not to mention a miscellaneous category for anything that does not fall into any of the others.

Because of the very "anything goes" nature of fanfic, it is hard to come up with any kind of coherent classification. It ranges in style from comedies, parodies, romances, horror, right up to pornography. There is some truly bizarre stuff out there—some that will make authors regret ever having put pen to paper!

Fan fiction can also be categorized according to storyline. A couple of popular sub-genres are alternate universe and crossover. In alternate universe fanfic, a main premise of a story or the motive of a character can be altered. For instance, suppose Harry Potter was the bad guy instead of Voldemort.

Related to alternate universe is a crossover fan fiction. In this, a character essentially "crosses over" to another reality. For example, a Spiderman adventure set in the time of the first *Blackadder* series. Or Princess Leia attending the Chalet School.

Alternative pairings of unlikely characters are also very common, not to mention popular. In this regard special mention must be made of "slash", or exclusively homosexual pairings, usually between improbable pairs. The term is rumoured to have originated from fan fiction relating a romantic relationship between Captain Kirk and Mr Spock of *Star Trek*! The word "slash" referred to the symbol "/". Slash is more often than not explicit—with authors aiming for erotica falling headlong into graphic pornography—and pairings range from suspected ones, to funny ones, to absolutely outlandish couples. Dr Watson and

Holmes have been "slashed" upon; so have a number of the Aes Sedai (women with special powers in Robert Jordan's Wheel of Time books); and even Snape and Dumbledore have not been spared!

The "Down with Fanfic" Lobby

A fair number of authors are rabidly opposed to fan fiction—some well-known ones being fantasy writers Robin Hobb, George R.R. Martin, Raymond Feist, Terry Goodkind, Terry Pratchett and Anne Rice. Some readers even believe that the real reason authors like to kill off their main characters is to prevent fan fiction!

There have been instances when authors, producers, and copyright holders have initiated legal action against propagators of fan fiction. It is hard to blame them for their paranoia sometimes, especially given incidents such as Marion Zimmer Bradley's run-in with a fanfic writer in the early 1990s, who threated to sue her for reportedly filching his ideas from a fan fiction he wrote. Bradley lost out on a book because of this.

Perhaps that explains why children's author Tamora Pierce, though not discouraging of fans wishing to write stories about her characters, has made it clear that she will not read any. J.K. Rowling on her part has no objection to it, but gives a thumbs down to sexually explicit stories about her characters.

With copyright laws being different in different parts of the world, the legal status of fan fiction is difficult to pin down. It is generally accepted that an idea cannot be copyrighted, and it is not illegal to be inspired. Thus, as long as fanfic writers do not try to pass their work off as original, and as far as possible respect the wishes of those authors who are not favourably inclined towards fan fiction, it can—and should—remain a fairly harmless pursuit.

Generally, fanfic authors simply live for sharing their ideas about how their beloved characters act and react in situations beyond what is laid out in a book, TV serial, movie and so on. Author Robin Hobb has a detailed write-up on her website about why she is opposed to fan fiction, quoting ethics, intellectual property rights, and various copyright-related issues. But she seems to have missed the very point of the pursuit. Most fanfic writers are aware that they do not own the characters—in fact, websites publishing fan fiction usually require submissions to come with a disclaimer to that effect, and in any case most writers do provide them of their own accord—nor are they out to make money from it, or pretend that their work is wholly original.

Marie Concholar, who hopes to be a published author some day, agrees that she would be thrilled to see fan fiction based on her work, but at the same time knows badly written stories will make her cringe. She admits to being undecided about authors who oppose fan fiction: "I'm on the fence. On one hand, I think a part of it is ego and they need to get over themselves. On the other hand, most fan fiction is crap, and I don't blame them if they wouldn't want that associated with their works!"

Separating the Wheat from the Crap... er, Chaff

Which brings us to a sad truth about fan fiction. The term 'literature' in context of this genre is very loosely applied indeed. Because it is largely unauthorized fiction, written by fans who are usually not writers, quality control is pretty much non-existent. There are some clearly talented fan fiction authors out there, but most of the work is quite horrifyingly bad!

Many believe that writing fan fiction is a good way for prospective writers to get some practice, as the characters and their backgrounds are already laid out. Others feel that it can be the worst thing to do if one is serious about writing, as it discourages creativity. Yet others are of the opinion that it is ethically and morally wrong to "use" something that "belongs" to someone else.

Clearly, the twain shall never meet, but taking a casual stroll through fan fiction Web sites makes one realize that the fanfic fandom in itself is a vast community, knit together by the love of something common, be it the attraction of an unlikely universe, the love of an enduring character, or sympathy with a familiar situation.

At one level fan fiction is the greatest form of flattery to an author; at the other end of the spectrum is a litany of intellectual property violations, copyright infringements, and questions of ethics. No doubt fan fiction inhabits a vast grey area in terms of legality. But that does not dim its popularity. The truth is—authors can love it or dread it, but fan fiction is here to stay.■

Payal Dhar is author and a soccer fan.

Books-in-Brief

NATURE: SKETCH; STILL LIFE: SKETCH
with Ashok Raj, Rs. 60.00 each
THIS AND THAT: 40 THINGS TO MAKE, DO AND TRY
By Anitha Bennett, Rs. 95.00
LET'S PARTY: 50 FUN-FILLED PARTY GAMES FOR CHILDREN
By Seema Dhameja, Rs. 100.00
All published by Scholastic

These are some really nice 'Things to Do' books from Scholastic. The sketchbooks should be interesting for 8-year-olds and up who are always keen to try different things. *This and That* has all sorts of things that a child can make or do and is ideal for holiday-time fun. These three books enhance imagination and creativity. *Let's Party* is a boon to harassed adults who have to organize children's parties – whether at home or end-of-term parties at school – and would surely build a reputation for holding great children's parties. There are some delightful and interesting games – old ones, variations on old ones and new ones. All of them would be useful in school libraries too.

Moneesha Sharma

Barnita Bagchi

SHOB BHUTURE
By Lila Majumdar
Ananda, Kolkata, 2004, pp.144, Rs 50.00

CHHOTADER OMNIBUS
By Lila Majumdar
Asia Publishing, Kolkata, 2004, pp. 400, Rs 100.00



After reading Vandana Singh's *Younguncle Comes to Town*, I remember talking to a friend, and our saying that the book was almost as funny and whimsical as Lila Majumdar's children's writing—and there is no greater compliment that we could bestow. That is an index of Majumdar's secure place in the Top of the Pops of Indian children's writing. Majumdar, born in 1908, and a cousin of that other incomparable humorist, Sukumar Ray, has written successfully in Bengali in a whole gamut of genres, such as ghost stories, science fiction, adventure novels, plays, and humorous short stories.

Shob Bhuture is a collection of Majumdar's ghost stories. I dare anyone to come up with other ghost stories that are so innovative: 'Majumdar's ghost stories are some of the most funny, unfrightening, yet uncanny stories ever written in this genre', I have written elsewhere.[1] A little boy walks out of home, sad and worried that he is flunking maths at school; he makes his way to an old ancestral house of theirs, and, magically, a friendly forefather takes charge of him, cossets him, but also gives him a thoroughly sound and useful session in arithmetic. Elsewhere, another depressed and sick little boy, locked in the home of an unloving relative, finds that Haider, a wonderful ghostly mahout, and his elephant walk into his room, and make the impossible possible; his father later tells him that he too had been comforted by Haider, and that 'only needy, sad people can see them'. This is an abiding characteristic of Majumdar's work: her unsentimental sympathy for the underdog, caught in her unique rainbow blend of humour, whimsy, and pathos.

In another story, we encounter two 'good-for-nothing wastrels', Notey and Guru, who have been promised payment if they can spend a whole night in a house notorious for being infested with destructive, riotous ghosts; when the two boys share their food with these ghosts, and promise them that the house will be used as a Welfare Home for boys who don't have food or shelter, the ghosts, who had been precisely such poor, needy boys when alive, do leave. Or take Damu the cranky village householder, who, when faced with the quandary of being asked to adjudge a contest of ghostly beauties, tactfully distributes the prize equally between all the contestants, leading to a change in his fortunes.

Adventures involving the two boys Gupi and Panu form another superb group in Majumdar's oeuvre. Gupi's engaging uncle Chhotomama, sleuth and chef extraordinaire, and a terrible coward in everyday life, inducts the two boys into a zany series of adventures, varying in locale from the boys' immediate neighbourhood to hill resorts and the Sunderbans.

If I was asked to name the undisputed classics in Majumdar's work, my answer would be *Din-Dupure*, *Podipishir Bormi Baksha*, and *Holde Pakhir Palok*. *Din-Dupure*, a series of short stories/ sketches, is as funny, as strange, as uncanny, as defamiliarizing as Sukumar Ray's *Abol Tabol* or Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*. Each tale is stylistically different in register, though the world is, as in most of Majumdar's writing, seen through the eyes of inquisitive, sceptical, naughty, constantly questing little boys. The phrase 'din dupure' connotes the utterly strange happenings that can and do take place under our very noses, in broad daylight.

Podipishir Bormi Baksha (Aunt Podi's Burmese Box) is written from the point of view of a little boy who sets out with his uncle to their ancestral home, to look for the Burmese Box of the title, containing family treasures. It is memorable, among other things, for its sidesplitting portrait of the formidable Podipishi, who so terrorized people and animals that a cow, after an encounter with her, started lactating yoghurt instead of milk!

And then we have *Holde Pakhir Palak* (The Yellow Bird's Feather), an enchanting, wistful novella which brings magic and fantasy and sympathy for human suffering into the world of a brother and sister, largely through the figure of Jhagru, the house servant, who comes from the beautifully evoked poverty-stricken yet enchanted world of Dumka. There are many, many more wonderful works in Majumdar's oeuvre, including hilarious dramatized episodes from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, in which the blend of affectionate irreverence and humour would surely attract the ire of religious fundamentalists.

Sadly, we have now reached a situation where even Lila Majumdar is slowly being forgotten by children and adults, in the onrush of Disney Comics and trigger-happy mindless toons. Yet so fresh is Majumdar's work that it can be constantly reinvented; it would even lend itself to imaginative graphic novel-type editions, and to animated cartoons. And certainly we need to translate her, as much of her oeuvre as we can, even if that elusive quiddity of her style can only be savoured in Bengali.■

Reference

[1] Barnita Bagchi, 'Cheery Children, Growing Girls, and Developing Young Adults: On Reading, Growing, and Hopscotching Across Categories', in Rimi Chatterjee and Nilanjana Gupta, eds, *Reading Children* (Forthcoming: New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2007) discusses Majumdar's oeuvre in greater detail.

Barnita Bagchi, apart from reading children's books, works as an academic at the Institute of Development Studies Kolkata.

Paro Anand

How should I start? You've caught me a bit off-guard...
So starts David's first letter to Mona in *David Days And Mona Nights* by Andreas Steinhofel and Anja Tuckermann.
So starts my article. How and where do I start seems a good beginning for each of the books rainbowing my table right now. Each calls for attention, space and its rightful place at the very top of the article—to be the crowning glory.

Each one deserves to be there too. I have spent the past many days delving deeply between each cover, trying to forget the deadline closing in. But I didn't want to rush through any one of them. For, as Ammoomma warns in *Devil's Garden* by Shreekumar Varma,

"Don't miss the details, if you jump in and try to speed up the tale, you'll lose the juice."

"Lose the juice?!"

"These stories are precious records of unusual people. You must give them enough value, and you must *imbibe* them. **You must never rush me!"**

Let me start then, by saying that with this bouquet, the health of children's literature seems to be blossoming. Each one is different, delightful, daring and also beautifully produced and packaged. Each one deserves to be savoured slowly, delectably.

Nyagrodha – The Ficus Chronicles by Kalpish Ratna is an amazing redention of the oft-told Panchatantra. But told, this time around, with a punch and zest that are the trademark of the two authors, Ishrat Syed and Kalpana Swaminathan whose near anagram – 'Kalpish Ratna' translates as 'the pleasures of imagination.' A term that really does describe the book. Straddling, as it does, the long ago world of Vishnu Sharman and the frenetic lives of today, the frame for the stories is not the dunderhead princes or of a desperate king in search of suitable education for his sons, but rather, three children and a monkey who step off a train at an unexpected halt. Three separate, desperate lives, entwined by the need to break away. And what a break they get when they join forces and enter a magical world of good and evil, talking animals, evil plots, seeds of suspicion, gullible kings and much, much more. There are the 'familiars', the blue jackal, the monkey with its tail in a wedge. But there are some very unexpected twists that Vishnu Sharman may wish he'd thought of himself. A wonderfully conceived and written book that is also a pleasure to hold and own. Recommended for those from 12 to a 100!

Talking animals can also be found in a delightful little book called *The Boastful Centipede and Other Creatures in Verse* by Zai Whitaker – a writer who knows her creatures well. A truly pretty little book with lively scorpions, fish ad colorful chameleons embossed on the cover. You'll learn a lot about each creature, and some, perhaps, about yourself! Each little living thing has a charming poem to itself. There's also a little fact file about each creature and the sweetest illustrations by Uma Krishnaswamy. One of my favorite verses in this is

Cockroach Addresses an Animal Lover
"Yes, you love your dog and cat
But when it comes to me
Your only comment is a screech
A loud and frightened EEEEE!"



From one kind of monstrous creature to the next. I'm talking about the snappy, zany little *Moin And The Monster* by Anushka Ravishankar. A fall-off-your-chair laughing kind of book with simply delightful illustrations by Anitha Balachandran – who seems to have an almost Quentin Blakish flair to her pen and humour. Humour is the key to this book. One that many children would identify with. For who has not had a nightmarish fear that a monster lurks under his bed. Imagine young Moin's shock when he actually finds one there! Except that he's pink, foolish and passionately fond of bananas. Not so scary after all! A great new addition to any kid's shelf. The author also delves with great understanding into the child's mind and sees things very much from the child's POV, something that not many authors manage to do. Take the principal in Moin's school to whom the lad is sent by an irate teacher. The principal, Kooki, 'looked closely at the boy before him. He looked a bit dreamy and he was not smiling or smirking. However, from his experience, he had learnt not to trust an innocent looking schoolboy.

"Are you mocking, enh?"

"No, I'm Moin, sir."

Read on – you must.

Monsters abound too, in Shreekumar Varma's *Devil's Garden*. Apart from some terrifying forest spirits, there's a rather overweight ghost of Grand Pappu – the founding father of Pappudom. You'll learn much about spirits and ghosts and though the knowledge may not win you any prizes at a GK contest, it will certainly leave you laughing as a tingle does its thing down your spine. Here's a free sample –

> Spirits are spirits after all. They assume different forms and do different things to suit their victims. The Screaming White Pancake, for instance, will fly at you like a large white dosa, and its screams are so terrible, they'll literally curdle your blood as you stand there, so that it stops flowing.

A book that's really funny and truly chilling from one moment to the next... It has layers and layers of thought-provoking debate on themes like bravery, taking personal risk for greater good, family and loyalty and even historical perspective. This is a book to explore, a journey to embark upon, an adventure to experience. Although slated as a book for 10+, I think that it is one that has enough depth and thought to be read by 13 year olds as well, who, unfortunately, wouldn't pick up a book that has a 10+ certification on the cover.

In fact, this seems to be new Puffin policy – putting a prominent age-grouping on the back cover. I don't completely agree with this for several reasons.

Firstly, each child has her own level of readership, each one also has their area of interest and it seems a shame to cut the reader off simply because they fall below or above the specified age group. Secondly, if a lovely book like *The Boastful Centipede* is touted as suitable for the 8+, then a ten year old or a 13 year old will never pick it up because it is already branded as being too childish. Yes, I know that someone at Puffin will kindly point out to me that the + sign signifies that everyone above that age could read it. But come on, we've all been young once, we know that no self-respecting teenager would like to be caught dead reading a book meant for eight year olds!

If it is felt that a recommendation must be given, maybe, it could be considered in the inside cover. After all, we don't have adult books recommended for 50+ or 25+ or for men or women – so why do we need this for kids? Definitely a subject for debate.

Now, coming to the most 'grown up' book of them all, since we're talking age-groups, there is the enigmatically titled *David Days And Mona Nights* that I started this article with. In today's day of emails and sms's it's such a different feel to explore the old world charm of snail mail. Although this isn't old worldly at all. Set in 1998 Berlin, some time after the Wall came down; this narrative chooses letters as its vehicle of communication. And

DEVIL'S GARDEN
By Shreekumar Varma
Puffin Books, 2006, pp. 216, Rs. 175.00

NYAGRODHA: THE FICUS CHRONICLES
By Kalpish Ratna
Puffin Books, 2006, pp. 287, Rs. 375.00

THE BOASTFUL CENTIPEDE AND OTHER CREATURES IN VERSE
By Zai Whitaker
Puffin Books, 2006, pp. 60, Rs. 150.00

DAVID DAYS MONA NIGHTS
By Andreas STeinhofel and Anjatuckermann
Tara Publishing, 2004, Rs. 175.00

MOIN AND THE MONSTER
By Anushka Ravishankar
Puffin Books, 2005, pp. 103, Rs. 155.00

because there is no narrator's observation, no voice over, the feel is intimate – we hear only the inner voices, innermost thoughts and confessions of two strangers who become friends and fall in love, although they meet but sporadically and minimally. The book, which is not a short story, nor novel, but an exchange of letters, makes you feel – how shall I put it? – Almost guilty. For prying, for reading someone else's very personal and intimate mail. Almost like Mona writes to David,

"Especially my brother…you know what he's going to do now? He's going to rifle through my desk the minute he sees me…going and there's no one else in the house. And then he'll read your letters, he's too curious…And you know something else? I think everyone here does it."

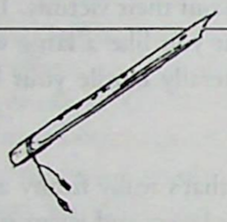
Here's where you, the reader, get a jolt. For you're doing it too – reading someone else's mail, 'sniffing and rummaging' in other people's things.

The book is that intimate; it gives you a voyeuristic feel to 'rifle' through it. That what makes it different from most other books – that's what makes it easy and difficult at the same time.

We come to expect the 'different' from Tara Publishing, and once again, we're not disappointed. Puffin and Tara have come up trumps and these new releases for children are good news for the health of children's literature.■

Paro Anand an author and storyteller, has performed her stories in many parts of India and abroad. She has headed the National Centre of Children's Literature, National Book Trust.

N. Chauhan



As a principal of a primary school, I am always looking for good poetry to teach my school kids; be it for their Poetry day or an Annual function, a good poem is a treasure worth looking for. Poetry Magic series has removed the headache of searching for poems in a lot of different books. It can take care of the poetry needs of almost all generations, old poetry to the modern. These slim volumes are beautiful to look at and easy to hold. The contents are carefully chosen. From all the old classic poems like 'Abou Ben Adhem' by Leigh Hunt, 'Patriotism' by Sir Walter Scott, 'My heart leaps up' by William Wordsworth(I wish this poem had been printed in its entire format) to 'In the Bazaars of Hyderabad' by Sarojini Naidu and 'On the sea shore' by Rabindra Nath Tagore , they cover mostly all poetry a child or a teacher's heart can desire.

Being a mountain lover, I especially like the poems by Ruskin Bond and Meera Uberoi on 'Living with Mounatins'and 'Autumn in the hills'. They bring the flavour of the hills very close and make them real. One is removed from the heat and the grime of the plains for a brief moment.

I must specially mention the poem 'I keep six honest men' by Rudyard Kipling. Such excellent advice in poetry form for any student of creative writing!

With their coloured pictures and easy to read print, I think these books will prove a favourite for the old and young alike age 5 years and above. A must have for a school library.

From the quiz books the one that I found most entertaining was *100Logic and Maths Brain Teasers.* Each Math problem is in a story form and solving each gives practice in logical thinking and analysis. Any teacher or child will find this book entertaining as well as educative.

The Scholastic Quiz series are specialized little quiz books, especially for football fans, one volume dealing only with football questions. The quiz on Environment and India is informative. The format is interesting – questions on deforestation, Abiotic, Biotic factors, rain forests etc. are knowledgeable and will act as a stimulant for children and teachers alike to search for the answers and know more about our precious environment. I would grade these books for children of ages 10 to 14 years of age.

All these books are wonderful for the quizzing during assembly time or even a quiz competition that a school may organize. I especially found the *100 Logic and Maths Brain Teasers* excellent for this purpose. I have a quiz daily in my school, based on General Knowledge, and important events, so now I ask from these brainteasers too and give an occasional mathematical puzzle. Children love to solve arithmetic problems, which not only develop their number skills but also sharpen their reasoning powers.

I have been using *Living in Harmony* series – *A Course on Value Education* – in my school for the past two years and can vouch for their popularity both amongst teachers and students. They are filled with fun activities and thought provoking stories and snippets, which are so easy to understand. The questions at the end of each lesson is carefully chosen and aimed at encouraging children to put into their own words what they think is the correct thing to do.

A stimulating and a knowledgeable series. Topics like 'Being a good neighbour', 'Simplicity', 'Concern for your land', not only teach the kids how to deal with moral issues but also pay attention to our environment. They develop an ethical sense on all relevant issues related to living in the twenty-first century. I think these are excellent books on Value education.

English Across the Curriculum is a thoughtfully assembled set of books for the purpose of teaching the English Language in a painless and interesting manner to children in a primary school UKG – Class 5. The primer is easy to follow, and comprehensive. A child just beginning to learn English can be taught in a simple and easy manner. There is revision of small and big alphabets and gradual introduction to similar sounding words. Book 1 introduces the child to simple sentences and questions and answers. Stories based on everyday common objects and happenings, encourage the child relate easily to the new English words introduced. The initial introduction to English is a difficult task. I find that these books deal with this problem in a thoughtful manner.

The idea of relating English to other subjects, is a good one but cannot make much difference in one textbook to the subject discussed in a particular chapter, as the information given is very basic. Including portions of grammar after each chapter is a very good idea. This will help lessen the daily load of books that a child brings to school.

The lessons are chosen with care. I like the mix of classic stories mixed with more modern tales e.g. the Dick Whittington story, Heidi which are old favourites, and the folk tales from across the world bring to the child a global perspective to his learning of the English language. English no longer means English as spoken by the British – It has a whole lot of other meanings now. Indian English, American English and so on.

On the whole this seems to be a good set of books for a student of English. It has interesting activities, interspersed with poetry and grammar.■

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POETRY MAGIC SERIES 1 TO 8
Edited by Keki N. Daruwalla
Scholastic, pp. 40, 40, 55, 55, 63, 63, 63 & 72, Rs. 49.90, 49.90, (3 to 8) Rs.54.90 each.

GET SMART 1AND 2
By Vaishali Gupta
Scholastic, pp. 70, Rs. 100.00

SCHOLASTIC QUIZ SERIES: MORE SCIENCE QUIZZES , PUZZLES AND GAMES
By Vaishali Gupta
Scholastic, pp. 64, Rs. 70.00

100 LOGIC AND MATHS BRAIN TEASERS
By Bal Phondke
Scholastic, pp. 120, Rs. 100.00

LIVING IN HARMONY SERIES–A COURSE ON VALUE EDUCATION–1 TO 8
By Oxford Publishers
Scholastic, pp. (1 & 2) 48 each, (3 to 5) 52 each & (6 to 8) 64 each, Rs. 49.90 each (1 & 2), Rs. 54.90 each (3 to 8)

ENGLISH ACROSS THE CURRICULUM (PRIMER & 1 TO 5)
By Ratna Sagar
Scholastic, pp. 71, 88, 112, 148 & 152, Rs. 58.00, Rs. 69.90, Rs. 84.90 & Rs. 89.90

Jaya Bhattacharji

THE PUFFIN BOOK OF CLASSIC SCHOOL STORIES
THE PUFFIN GOOD READING GUIDE FOR CHILDREN
Both edited by Ruskin Bond
Puffin Books, New Delhi, 2006, pp.246 & 260, Rs.250.00 & Rs. 195.00

TALES OF THE OPEN ROAD
By Ruskin Bond
Puffin Books, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 202, Rs.200.00

THE RUSKIN BOND MINI BUS
RUPA'S SUPERNATURAL OMNIBUS
Rupa & Co., New Delhi, 2006, pp. 310 & 474, Rs. 95.00 & Rs. 295.00

Bond anthologies tend to be collections that he has lent his name to. Fortunately, there are still those rare volumes that one gets to read which consist of his own writing though more and more of these seem to be regurgitated pieces. But, as he has says in his defence, "Sometimes I wonder if I have written too much. One gets into the habit of serving up the same ideas over and over again; with a different sauce perhaps, but still the same ideas, themes, memories, characters. Writers are often chided for repeating themselves. Artists and musicians are given more latitude" (p.127, 'Joyfully I Write').

The Ruskin Bond Mini Bus is a selection of stories, essays and poems from four of his previously published collections – *Ruskin Bond's Himalayan Tales*, *The India I love*, *A Little Night Music*, and *Roads to Mussoorie*. There are some of the usual suspects that never fail to delight - 'The Wind on Haunted Hill', 'From Pool to Glacier', 'Visitors from the Forest', 'A Bouquet of Love', 'The India I Carried with Me', and 'Trees by my Window'. Of these, the ones describing nature and its creatures are stunning. These have a lovely way of recreating the feeling of utter delight or peace. Add to this essays like 'The Break of Monsoon in Meerut' and 'A Vagabond in Delhi' from *Tales of the Open Road*, and it is a lovely way to spend a hot summer afternoon.

Bond's sketches of the people he meets – strangers or friends — are also simply, but very well described. I laughed aloud when I read 'Party Time in Mussoorie' about Aunty Bhakti who got stuck in the Indian style lavatory, and was moved by the gentle descriptions of children like Rakesh who plant and nurture a cherry tree or of those various friends of his youth, including Sudeep whom everyone detested. These reminiscences work splendidly as isolated character sketches but they rarely create a sense of a community.

An interesting thread in these anthologies is the few, but very perceptive meditations Bond has on writers and the current status of Indian publishing. For a while now, we have felt that the Indian publishing scene is blossoming but there are few substantive figures or data to prove that this is in fact the case. It is only a feeling and that is where it remains. Certainly India has no literary agents of note so far, and there is the huge potential of multilingual publishing waiting to be tapped, if only one were able to crack the code of regional tastes and markets, but as Bond rightly points out in his preface to *The India I Love*, the one thing that India does not lack is a massive base of readers. Budding writers would benefit by keeping in mind his pithy comments on his theory of writing: "The conception should be as clear as possible, and words should flow like a stream of clear water, preferably a mountain-stream! …Too long at the desk, and words lose their freshness" (p.126 'Joyfully I write').

Let's move on to the variety of anthologies Bond lends his name to. It is not very clear whether he is the actual editor of these volumes, and their quality is uneven. Of the eclectic collection being reviewed here, *The Puffin Good Reading for Children* is a very good idea. Literature for children always causes a great deal of angst in the publishing industry as neither the retailer nor the parent and educationist is very sure about what a "good" book for a child or young adult is. *The Puffin Good Reading for Children* is a *pot-pourri* of titles with a brief description of the better known ones. There are little icons indicating which of the books mentioned are award winning titles or have been adapted into movies and television serials.

Nevertheless, there are some reservations about this kind of anthology. The mixed bunch of selections in it is but a guide to reading and should not be taken as an accurate picture of what is available in the Indian market for children. Secondly, the arrangement of titles within each genre is not organized chronologically, which can be quite frustrating at times. Finally, it may have helped to include some Internet links to the official websites of authors, publishing houses and award sites. In our interconnected world, the boundaries are rapidly blurring between the television, computer, mobile phone, and even the book, given the recent launch of the electronic book tablets.

Conceptualizing anthologies is not the easiest things to do. The guiding principle has to be very strongly defined. After the incredibly satisfying Bond originals, *Rupa's Supernatural Omnibus* is irritating. There are five sections covering supernatural themes like vampirism, lycanthropy, diabloism, demonology, sorcery and other occult experiences. Some of the writers included are Edith Wharton, R. L. Stevenson, Andrew LangBram Stoker, Frederick Marryat, Lafcadio Hearn and Ruskin Bond. It is as if the stories have been arbitrarily plucked out of the air and slapped together into an anthology, with a brief and quite unsatisfactory introduction by Ruskin Bond. The anthology targets youngsters but surely that does not mean that the historical context of the stories or the evolution of genres could not have been discussed. It is a good opportunity lost. Information should never be sniggered at, but should be constantly discussed till it becomes a part of a society consciousness, so that display of ignorance like that of young journalists asking, (and this is true) "What is the Emergency?" does not occur.■

Jaya Bhattacharji is with *Zubaan*.

Shantala N. Palat



The word "childhood' brings many delightful memories to our minds. We were carefree and happy...We were not overburdened in any way....Yes, those were the days of innocence. Yet Anees Jung shatters the myth in *Lost Spring Stories of Stolen Childhood*. Child labour stares in the face as Jung ruthlessly describes the experiences of the young ones. She touches on the familiar issues of children begging, working in tea stalls or by the roadside. Yet these are issues, which she adds, are ignored by us. We turn the other way when we see it happening before our eyes. Her descriptions of the appalling conditions in which they live affect the reader deeply. She forces us to think and squirm uncomfortably while relating the real life stories of these children. She also attempts to understand why it happens, the fate of these children and what measures can be taken to improve it. Her concern for their future affects us as well, and Chotu, Raju, Munni are immortalized through this book.

LOST SPRING –STORIES OF STOLEN CHILDHOOD
By Anees Jung
Penguin Books, India, 2005, pp. 126, Rs 195

THE ICARUS GIRL
By Helen Oyeyemi
Bloomsbury, Great Britain, 2005, pp. 322, 2.99 pounds sterling

BLOWN AWAY
By Patrick Cave
Simon and Schuster, UK, 2005, pp.342, 6.99 pounds sterling

'Travels Into Childhood' describes children's lives while 'A Place Called School' deals with education. These are stories of despair and hope, which, despite everything, capture the innocence of childhood. They are children even if they work in the stores or the factories. They have their dreams and desires. Each one wants to do something big. They want to change their lives and are determined to do so. Hope begins to rise and peaks through 'Sharing Memories' and 'Joining Hands'. Stories of courage and determination lighten the grim reality of the working child. As Nagaraj, once a child labourer, asserts that it "is only when participation grows from the village to the city to a global level that we can build a new society..."

The Icarus Girl also revisits the dark days of childhood...The eight-year-old Jessamy Harrison is a loner and escapes into the world of books and, strangely enough, enclosed places like the cupboard. Her imagination is her best friend. Her life takes a turn when a trip to Nigeria brings a new companion, Titiola, into her life. Tillytilly, as Jess calls her, is the same age as her and is able to do things which Jess can never dream of doing. For the first time, she is happy as she believes that she has found true friendship in Tillytilly. But this perfect friendship moves from carefree innocence to fear and tension and finally to confrontation, as the true character of Tillytilly dawns upon Jess.

The structure is clear and straightforward but a doubt haunts us. Is Tillytilly a ghost, Jess's alter ego, or a figment of her imagination? These questions are not answered satisfactorily. Oyeyemi confuses the reader till the end when Jess has to battle with Tillytilly for the last time. Also, the author tends to describe Jess's thoughts and feelings in detail enough to irritate and exhaust the reader, and the story seems to drag at times.

The concept of ibeji in Yoruba culture occupies an important place in the book. By custom, if one or both twins die, the parents carve a statue to represent the deceased child. This is the *ere-ibeji*, or "image of the twice-born". Twins are believed to be spiritual beings with special powers. Their birth is feared and desired, for they have the power to cause sickness, infertility and even death to their parents, siblings and themselves if not properly honoured. But the parents had become too modern to respect tradition. As her grandfather tells Jess, her mother "didn't just take her body away from this place—she took everything. Nothing of her is left here" (p. 28).

Jess is hard to like or to reject. Her neurotic nature at eight is uncomfortable to digest and, strangely enough, it could cause the reader to recall the unhappiness of childhood.

Blown Away belongs to a different genre altogether. As the title suggests, there is a growing need to be free and shake off the chains that binds us.

Adelaine, a flawed clone, finds that she has been chosen to be the saviour of the world. She needs to protect herself in a society that has increasingly become obsessed with the notion of the survival of the strongest.

The story contains the chilling elements of the Nazi quest for the flawless human being. You need to have survived all situations or else you are considered dirt or filth. The game "Fit To Live" tests their abilities. The flawed Browns, beset by poverty or class discrimination, choose to play this game, although they know that they will never come back alive. The game is disturbingly close to the fate of the Jews. Adelaine enters the game, risking her life. After all, "*Life is an intoxicating game. 'Yes,' the other voice agrees, inside her, 'it is a game'*" (p. x).

The story is woven round the four central characters of REF, the Nazi type, and Adelaine, both in the present, and Dominic and Ruth, long dead lovers from a remote past. It moves through Nazi cloning experiments and a romance between lovers long dead and gone, all brought into the present with the mystery unravelled only at the end of the book. It is futuristic by recalling the worst fears and experiences of the twentieth century. Is Cave warning us?...

Shantala N. Palat is studying art.

Damini Purkayastha

OPERATION RED JERICHO
By Joshua Mowll
Walker Books, 2005, £12.99

VOYAGER
By Jan Mark
Macmillan Children's Books, 2006, UK£10.99

Once upon a time, not so very long ago, children grew up on books about fairies, and smiling mushrooms, detective dogs and five children, faraway lands and enchanted forests. Today's children are privy to battles larger than themselves, larger than life. Between prophesied heroes and worlds torn apart by evil—children learn the larger binary of life early in life. The reluctant heroes of these two novels, Joshua Mowll's *Operation Red Jericho* and Jan Mark's *Voyager* follow the footsteps of iconic heroes like Harry and Frodo facing demons and death albeit without the classic burden of being prophesied chosen ones.

Mark's book, a sequel to the hugely successful *Riding Tycho* is the story about young Demetria's escape from the oppressive life on High Island, a journey that leads to adventure, discovery and a life with the Underground. Mark is an excellent storyteller and no one can argue that her story lacks originality. The one glaring drawback of the narrative is that its takes a long time to take off. Add that to the fact that Mark works with the assumption that everyone is reading the book as a sequel, and hence come armed with the knowledge of Book One; it would take an exceptionally patient young child to sit through the non events in the initial half of *Voyager*.

Mark wastes no time explaining the background to High Island or the horrors that Demetria runs away from. We meet her floating on a log with the voice of Ianto Morgan in her head as she is picked up on Laurentia Bay. Dehydrated and on the verge of death Demetria is glad that she is saved but horrified upon learning that the boat is heading towards Laurentia, towards the very place she almost died trying to escape. Determined not to be sent back home Demetria pretends to be a mute and finds comfort in silence as she is adopted by Mai's family. Here the story begins to pick up as we learn about a paranoid Laurentian government which is on the lookout for Baltican spies.

A few incidents later she finds herself in a safehouse among people belonging to the Underground . Here is where the story truly becomes gripping and one cannot help but feel a certain amount of childlike wonder alongside Demetria as she is introduced to a whole new world, literally. To narrate any more would be to ruin the plot but suffice to say you'll be hankering for Book Three soon enough.

Operation Red Jericho makes up in terms of plot what it lacks in narrative. With a befuddling stamp on the cover declaring it an'uncorrected book proof' Mowll's book takes some sustained reading to get past the somewhat unnecessary attempts at novelty. From pull out maps to trivia—book like picture boxes in the margins, pages are randomly stamped HGS Confidential Material, which if one were to consider the fact that it is a third person narrative would be problematic. But by the end of the book one is more willing to forgive Mowll because he succeeds in the most important area, i.e., the story. The first in the Guild Trilogy the book manages to generate enough curiosty and sustain the whodunit element necessary for any good sequel. As Becca and Doug Mackensie discover their uncle's ship, the Expedient, they stumble across a whole new world, one far more exciting than school. Quite in line with Hollywood's Spy Kids, these kids too find themselves embroiled in a world of intrigue and mystery. From abducted French scientists and pirate ships to the Honorable Guild of Specialists, a secret society sworn to protect the dangerous element Zoridium from the hands of power hungry men—Becca and Doug truly have an adventure at hand. But Mowll's villain, Sheng Fat, truly takes the cake. No less than any James Bond antagonist, Fat is the quintessential bad guy. As if having an island, a fortress and an army at hand didn't make him menacing enough, Fat also has a nasty little habit of biting people's fingers off to add to his garland. Just the kind of gory character children can delight in.

With a whole range of interesting albeit somewhat stereotypical characters, the prodigal twins Xu and Xi, of Sujing Quantou (yes, another secret society), Liberty Da Vine, the swashbuckling heroine and Linen Suit, the villain of the sequel, the book manages to stay riveting. Having said that, however, Becca and Doug are still loveable characters. Doug with his stinking lucky socks and memory for facts and uncanny grasp of science, Becca with her fierce integrity and fearsome skill with a rapier; these siblings are a force to be reckoned with, but mostly they are just children playing at grown ups.

Both novelists offer readers a world suitably equipped to activate and delight the imagination. From highlands and holograms in *Voyager* to underwater mishaps and wild taxi chases in *Operation Red Jericho*, the characters take readers along on their journey. At the end of the day Demetria is left making a life altering decision as Becca and Doug join the HGS and swear to look for their parents. No longer about simplistic morals and magical solutions these contemporary children's book have redefined the contours of children's literature. Even fantasy is no longer an escape from the warlike reality, and children like Becca, Demetria and Doug seem ready to face the world head on as perhaps their counterparts in reality are.■

Damini Purkayastha is working with *India Today.*



Damini Butalia

Four pink books and one green one. When they were handed to me, I thought 'ah, chic-lit', and I was thankful that at least one looked slightly different – *Monsoon Summer*. Of course I ended up reading it first, and analysing it the most, but on the whole they were all quite enjoyable.

Monsoon Summer is a rather sweet story of a kid of mixed parentage getting in touch with her roots – in this case, India. With a love story thrown in, not to mention a view of India from a naïve and honest westerner's perspective, it's an interesting book which keeps one involved. It lets you identify with the characters and empathize with them and it also makes you think. But it has another theme running through it, that of change, that change is possible and is good. When our protagonist Jazz and her family decide to spend a summer in India, each of them is changed by the experience. It's not because of what India is, but because a new place and coming across new ideas and outlooks encourages them to take a few chances. Clichéd though it sounds, 'they get in touch with their real selves' probably gets the message across quite clearly. They discover new things about themselves as they discover a country they find wonderful for its colour, energy and character and terrible in it's poverty.

Sarah, Jazz's mother, is Indian by birth and was adopted by an American couple when she was young. When she wants to go to India, to work at the orphanage where she was brought up till the time she was adopted, her husband and children leave behind their holiday plans and come along to support her on this journey. Their family motto is Families Stick Together, no matter what. I found it rather touching. It may have been a little too perfect to be real at times, but it was nice to envision this family with Jazz patiently listening to Eric, her younger brother, the kids so sensitive to their parents, and everyone looking after each other.

One thing which made me think was Jazz's description of how everyone in India stared at her. For a minute I was surprised when she didn't understand why they were staring. She thought perhaps they weren't used to seeing families with one parent Indian and one American. A beautiful fair girl will be stared at. We're so used to it, but why? Why do we have this rude habit of staring? And we are still so fascinated by a white person. We, in India discriminate so much by skin colour. The associations and prejudices are so deeply engrained in us. When Jazz went out with her mother who

had much darker skin and so called 'lower caste' looks, everyone assumed Sarah was her servant. When I read that I wished I could say 'Not true'. But even those of us brought up in cities, in the midst of all this apparent modernity and progressive thinking, carry with us stereotypes and prejudices based on economic status or skin colour or region. And we are only the smallest of minorities. Well, we have a long way to go.

Someone tells Jazz when she first landed in Mumbai that in India it isn't considered rude to stare. I wonder about that. I also wonder where this attitude comes from. Our culture is one of hospitality and courtesy. But, in cities like Delhi at any rate, courtesy rarely extends beyond the four walls of our home. Any large city tends to become more impersonal, fast paced and abrupt. But perhaps in our hurry to be modern, we are not being selective enough to choose the good from both worlds.

Ten of Us – Jottings from the Diary of an Indian Urban Teenage Girl is delightfully easy to identify with. It is as close as one could probably get to the jottings from the diary of an Indian teenage girl. Jiju is a typical urban teenager. She likes rock music, chatting with her friends, and writing in her diary.

The style of writing is just like a real diary, the flow of thought is not always perfect, the author often switches from one style to another. In the beginning the bad grammar was distracting and a little annoying. While to some extent the Indian English does let one identify Jiju as someone one might actually know, I found it a little excessive.

So if you are a stickler for correct English, just take a couple of chapters to get used to it and you'll find the story quite enjoyable. The poems, which were written by Eeshani when she was 14, are funny and sweet. When I was young I don't remember reading many stories about young urban middle class teenagers, with whom one could identify in every way, not just universal emotions and stages in life, but culture-specific jokes and anecdotes, trivialities and complaints.

In *Ten of Us* Jiju lives in a joint-but-on-different-floors family, together, but giving each other their space. She makes fun of the never-ending soaps on television. She has board exams next year – hence a 'crucial' year ahead. She wants to be a vet and a film director, but in a family of doctors and engineers, they just don't understand artistic people like her. When her parents disconnect the internet connection at home, she is left stranded – no music, no chatting, and she has to make do with the telephone.

My recommendation would be, if you can get your hands on it, open it at random and read a page, you're quite likely to buy it after that.

The next couple of books I discuss are well written easy-to-read children's books. While the first is an adventure story, the second is pure chic-lit. Jim Marshall's *Jane Blonde* is an exciting spy and mystery story for young kids. It has the science fiction bit and the lost-father bit, but it's mainly the story of how an ordinary Janey's life suddenly gets rather interesting when an extraordinary lady G-Mamma shows up in her life. Before she knows what's happening she's caught up in a Spy Story, complete with SPI-labs, SPI-cycles, SPI-suits and secret codes. I can't say anything more for fear of giving away too much. Mystery-lovers, head for this one.

The Wedding Planner's Daughter is a cross between *Chocolat* without the chocolate, and *The Wedding Planner*, purely because Willa's mother is a wedding planner. Perfect Chic-Lit, in a completely positive sense. It's quite hilarious, just the kind of light reading when one wants to take a nice break from life.

Now we come to *How to Walk in High Heels: The Girl's Guide to Everything*. Yes, it is exactly what it sounds like. Consider this. 'Every girl must have at least ten varieties of heel on hand at all times.' It also gets too British many a time. And if you have any taste in music, let me warn you right now, do not open the music section.

Basically I think this book is for entertainment, i.e. if you can't laugh with, laugh at. It may offer enlightenment in areas in which one is absolutely clueless though. Perhaps a more apt name would be 'How to Walk in High Heels for (British) Dummies'. For example, if you really want to know how to use a mobile phone, it gives you the real basics, beginning with switching on. In fact the best example is about how to actually put on your high heels. This is how it goes – Sit on the edge of you chair, feet hip width apart, flat on the floor, knees over the feet. And so on for half a page of small print, till finally you 'lean back, clench bottom, thigh and stomach muscles and slowly lift to stand'!

But to be fair, there are parts which are readable, some funny and a few actually useful. It explains the game of poker, and the order in which different hands are ranked. It advises the first-time emailer not to open attachments from unknown email addresses and that CAPITALS MEAN ONE IS SHOUTING. After a lot of page-turning I found something I needed – How to sit in front of your screen. But it did take me an hour.

Ultimately I wonder who this book is meant for. It's not funny enough to read for humour, it hardly tells you anything you don't know and if a sweet little kid used it as her guide to everything, I'd be scared to know how she'd turn out.

It seems to me that a large percentage of children's books these days run on a few themes. One is the absent father and/or the lonely mother. Mostly this applies to American authors, but then they represent much of the book market. Of course it is a reflection of American society today and the large number of single-parent families. But the question is, how appropriate is this for Indian kids? After all if television serials and movies can distort or shape our perceptions of reality and life, should books be exempt from this discussion? There are many differences between the two media, and avid readers (including One) would probably argue that reading is not passive reception that it widens one's understanding, but perhaps this question needs to be debated. At the same time, it is heartening to see that books are being written by Indian authors, which reflect Indian present-day reality too.■

MONSOON SUMMER
By Mitali Perkins
Simon and Schuster, 2006, pp. 257, £ 5.99

TEN OF US: JOTTINGS FROM THE DIARY OF AN INDIAN URBAN TEENAGE GIRL
By Manjira Majumdar with Ishanee Sarkar.
Illustrated by Susanna Kuehl
Frog Books, 2005, pp. 75, Rs. 125.00

JANE BLONDE: SENSATIONAL SPYLET
By Jill Marshal
Macmillan Chilodren's Books, 2006, pp. 244, £ 5.99 (printed)

THE WEDDING PLANNER'S DAUGHTER
By Coleen Murtagh Paratore
Macdmillan Children's Books, 2006, pp.195, £ 7.99

HOW TO WALK IN HIGH HEELS: THE GIRL'S GUIDE TO EVERYTHING
By Camilla Morton
Hodder and Stoughton, 2006, pp. 468, £ 3.50 (pricetag) 7.99 (printed)

Damini Butalia is Consultant in communication unit, *Development Alternative*.

Books-in-Brief

PLANT; TREE; BIRD; WATER
Eye Know series, £3.25 each
Savage Earth; Trevor Day
£ 4.20 each
All published by Dorling Kindersley

The Eye Know nature books are for British children, so are not entirely relevant in India. Their most exciting feature, from the point of view of 5-6 year-olds, are the flaps that open to reveal more information or cut-outs through which an interesting picture can be seen. They are imaginatively laid out but difficult to read in some parts and some have a more structured, logical presentation of the subject (e.g., *Plant*) than others (e.g., *Water*). *Savage Earth* is a slim book for older children and covers much the same ground as other such books, but from the point of view of earth-shaping phenomena. The pictures are good, but since it is published in 2001, the information is dated on topics such as tsunamis or earthquakes.

Moneesha Sharma

Abhijit Menon-Sen



BIRD BY BIRD
By Mehran Zaidi
Scholastic India, Delhi, 2006, pp.118, Rs. 175.00

It's easy to review a field guide: does it cover all of the 1200-or-so species in India? Does it have good illustrations? Are the differences between Blyth's and Richard's Pipits accurately represented? What are the descriptions like? Are the latest taxonomic changes incorporated? That there are fewer than half a dozen comprehensive field guides to the region doesn't hurt either. They're familiar territory.

But this book isn't a field guide, and it sidesteps familiar questions in its focus on beginning bird-watchers, who usually have to make do with a field guide that assumes more experience than they have.

Fewer than a hundred species are covered, in five groups: birds around your house (like Sparrows and Mynas), birds in city parks (Koel, Kite), birds in open areas (Kingfisher, Robin), birds in forests (Woodpecker, Hornbill), and water birds (Sarus, Egrets). There's a small section on endangered birds tacked on at the end, and resident and migratory species are differentiated throughout.

Each bird is described on a single page (for the most part; some entries spill into the next page), with the size in centimetres, a selection of "Indian Names", the scientific name, a summary of food habits, the call, habitat, and distribution followed by a brief illustrated description. For vulnerable species, a "risk meter" tells you how close the bird is to extinction.

It's disappointing that the author chose to express size in centimetres, a measure which won't mean much to beginners, and is difficult even for experienced observers to judge in the field. Salim Ali's "Myna+, Crow-" scale would have been so much more expressive and appropriate here. The distribution information is fairly useless too: only four out of about ninety entries say anything other than "widespread".

The habitat and call descriptions are concise and accurate, however, and it's nice to have a précis of the food habits and Indian names (often in Hindi, Bangla, and Malayalam, though not always), which are usually left out in pocket field guides. What birds eat, in particular, is something that many people are curious about, and having an answer makes feeding behaviour more explicable and more interesting to observe.

The illustrations would have disappointed me if this were a field guide; and they did, at first, until I realized that the selected species are mostly very distinctive, and that minor errors in form and colour could hardly detract from their identification. These illustrations are not constrained for space and, with one on each page, aren't intimidating in the way a field guide can be (where the males, females, juveniles, and variant plumages of a dozen very similar-looking species compete for space on every page). Despite my initial reservations, I grew to like the illustrations. They're recognizable, a bit quirky (as birds often tend to be), and feel entirely appropriate to this book.

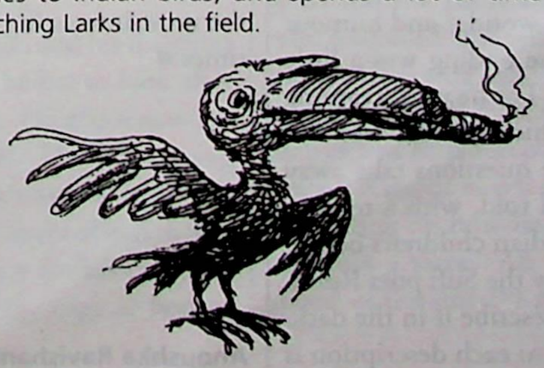
Despite all my nit-picking, however, the individual descriptions make me like this book. Again, not constrained for space in the way field guides are, these aren't the usual abbreviated summary of the important points of identification. Instead, it devotes the space to describing what the bird does ("it has [the habit] of lunging at an insect [and] nearly toppling over in the attempt"), or to something interesting about the bird ("the demand for Peacock feathers, and their fat, believed to possess curative properties, has led to their large-scale killing"). There's a brief physical description, but again, the selection makes it unnecessary to go into too much detail on the subject.

The greatest service an introductory book can perform, in my view, is to show that there's more to bird-watching than ticking names on a list and moving on, and instead to learn to observe them at length. I think this book's approach to holding a beginner's interest without getting bogged down in minute details is exactly right.

In the end, the only significant shortcoming of this book is in the lack of a bibliography, which leaves an advanced beginner with no preparation for outgrowing the book and moving on to the standard field guides. The introduction does mention some books and web sites in passing, but fails in what I think is an important responsibility to provide useful detail about the (many!) resources available to interested amateurs.

But *Bird by Bird* (especially at little more than a third of the price of Salim Ali's *Book of Indian Birds*) makes a nice gift to the absolute beginner; and its descriptions set it apart from the other "beginner's guides" I've seen recently.■

Abhijit Menon-Sen is a compulsive collector of field guides to Indian birds, and spends a lot of time watching Larks in the field.



Anoushka Ravishankar

What is it that sets apart a children's book from a book for adults? Should there even be such distinctions? After all, the best children's books also appeal to adults. But the converse, unfortunately, is not true. There are many books which adults like, that a child would not enjoy reading. And anyway, how does one decide what makes a good children's book? The ones that teach children valuable lessons? The ones that entertain them? It could be argued that it is the book that the child reads again and again, sometimes right into adulthood, finding new things to wonder at with each reading, that can be called a truly good children's book.These questions become rather more than merely academic ones, when one reads the beautiful, aesthetically appealing books published by Katha.

Earthsong is a book with magnificent illustrations created from artworks of clay and plasticene by Enrique Lara and Luis Garcia. The book begins with the earthsong, a lovely poem, full of imagery and music:

... To the trees and all things green
To the worms that work unseen ...

But the poem has an unfortunate twist in its tail. It ends with:

... So let's enjoy this planet rare
Let's remember to care and share

Oh, oh. Why this moral lesson? If the song does its job well, if the pictures and words evoke the feelings the writer and the illustrators want them to evoke, the call to moral action is redundant. And if the words and visuals do not do their job, these pious lines will fall on deaf ears in any case.

The whole song appears on the first spread. Then, each line of the earthsong is marvellously illustrated, page by page, and some random and interesting facts are given about each creature or thing on the page. The randomness of these facts, and indeed of the creatures about whom these facts speak, is not a problem. But one wishes the book had been designed a little more creatively. When there are so many elements on the page, the eye does not know which way to go, leading to much exasperation. In the end, one wonders whom this book is for. Can a child really enjoy it? With such rich illustrations and evocative lines, this book could have been a collector's item, if didacticism had not got the better of the creators.

Once Upon A Moontime by Mamang Dai, on the other hand, is a delightful collection of tales from Arunachal Pradesh, about the creation of the earth, the sun, the moon and the river. Told with simplicity and charm, these stories raise the childlike illustrations by Nimret Handa to a level that they could not have aspired to unassisted.

The Story of Shangmiyang the Tangkhul Giant is a book that belies its cover. While the cover could have been better designed, the illustrations and the story are perfectly blended. As always, Suddhasattwa Basu's illustrations are marvellous. They add a dimension of wonder and humour to the whimsical story of the giant who sneezed. The ending was a little perplexing, however. The book ends with the lines – "For he was dreaming of the Shiroi Fairy, and the day she lost her lily." Which fairy? When did she lose her lily? How? Why? All these unanswerable questions take away somewhat from the satisfaction of reading a tale well told, with a tension between visuals and words which is rarely found in Indian children's books.

What Shape is an Elephant? is the well-known tale by the Sufi poet Rumi. Four people who have never seen an elephant try to describe it in the dark. But each of them can only feel a part of the elephant, so each description is entirely different from the other. This story has been told over and over, and yet, like all classic tales that survive the ages, it never ceases to entertain and amaze. The illustrations by Feeroozeh Golmohammadi are unusual and quite stunning. There is a page where the text says: "They felt the elephant with their palms, trying to make out its picture in their minds." The illustrator has interpreted this visually as many raised palms, with an eye on each palm. And with each shortsighted description of the elephant, the illustrator creates a scene which is suggested by the description. This is the best kind of picture book, when the illustrator becomes a storyteller too. But again, had the page design been a little less conventional it might have seemed less like a book for adults to exclaim over, and more like a book for children to dog-ear.

In *Surangini* by Partap Sharma, Vandana Bist's illustrations add new meanings to the story. The undulating lines and the rich colours create a parallel narrative which can almost be 'read'. While the story is engaging, and the illustrations are enchanting, the climax, when the weaver Kalu tells the tale that brings Surangini back from the carpet into which she has sunk, falls a bit flat. Could it have lost its punch in the process of abridgement? The book has been abridged from the original *The Surangini Tales* and perhaps reading this story will inspire many readers to look for the original version.

A Jungle Safari by Geeta Dharmarajan has all the immediacy of a real journey. The whole narrative is in second person, addressing the reader as 'you'. 'You' are the protagonist, the brave adventurer journeying through the jungle on the elephant, Bhama. For a minute you wonder if the author will lose herself in a maze of tenses, but the tone wobbles, rights itself and then speeds on surefootedly. The illustrations in black and white by Sonal Panse have some interesting perspectives and ably support the text.

The First Sun Stories is another collection of unusual northeastern folktales. The stories have been written by six different authors, and illustrated by ten different illustrators. It was quite delightful to encounter the unmistakable styles of accomplished illustrators like Taposhi Ghoshal, Sonali Biswas, Sujata Singh and Uma Krishnaswamy, but it was even more delightful to discover new gems like Amanda Suutari. A collection of this sort is always a mix of the good, the excellent and the passable, but this lot of unusual tales is definitely one for the bookshelf.

So many lovely books, and yet ... There is something about many of these books that make them look like books created by adults for adults. They are beautifully illustrated and flawlessly produced, but the publishers should probably pay more attention to simple things like font sizes, page layouts and cover design. Even the size of the book can make a huge difference to whether it works for the age group it is targeted. Less values, more fun, one feels like telling the publishers! Sure, books sometimes need to inform and improve the reader. But they also need to be read for the joy of reading, for the incomparable delight of looking at a perfectly designed page.

All this is not to deny the fact that these books from Katha are some of the most interesting Indian children's books one has come across in recent times.■

EARTHSONG
By Geeta Dharmarajan
Katha, 2005, Rs. 120.00

ONCE UPON A MOONTIME
Presented by Mamang Dai
THE STORY OF SHANGMIYANG THE TANGKHUL GIANT
By Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya
Both by Katha, 2005, Rs. 80.00 each

WHAT SHAPE IS AN ELEPHANT?
By Rumi
OFOQ Publications, Teheran, Iran, English Translation, Katha, 2005, Rs. 95.00

SURANGINI
By Partap Sharma
Katha 2005, Rs. 120.00

A JUNGLE SAFARI
By Geeta Dharmarajan
Katha, 2005, Rs. 60.00

THE FIRST SUN STORIES
Edited by Geeta Dharmarajan
Katha, 2005, Rs. 125.00



Anoushka Ravishankar is children's author and editor.

Anhad Hindal



GOOD HEAVENS!! ONE ACT PLAYS FOR CHILDREN
By Poile Sengupta
Puffin, 2006, pp. 199, Rs. 195.00

Good Heavens is the name of the book, or the feelings of shock that came over me as I finished it? Do Indian authors really think that 10-12 year old read stories about elephants named 'Elphie' or wasn't that meant for five year olds? Are Indian children really that juvenile? My advice, please write books that are really for the pre-teens and teens of our country and not for the 'kids'.

My favourite story out of all of them was 'A Christmas Miracle', though Sengupta could have been a little more creative with her imagination than copying Harry Potter and *A Christmas Carol*. A story about a young girl whose parents die in a car crash and is sent to her "Hitler" aunt and uncle and her fat, ugly, utterly and completely spoilt son, Junior (Dudley Dunsely incarnated). Junior has a bad dream and is comforted by the girl and the narrator who tells him about the story of the giant and the garden, and then the story of Bethlehem. Soon the 'Durselys' miraculously become kind-hearted and warm with a little help from the spirit of Christmas eve. (*Christmas Carol*?) And they become a big happy family. I liked this play as it teaches us the importance of relationships whether it is with our family, friends or any one around us. Definitely something for the youth of today to think about!

Good Heavens is a little too confusing for my taste and I thought that some characters need not have been there. Otherwise a good plot. I am a great fan of music and I thought that 'Hamswadhani' really teaches us the importance of music and how it brings the world together in peace and harmony. I can also relate the child to myself when I used to think classical music was boring. The play, 'No, not I' was (in my opinion) not very well thought out. True, imagination should run wild, but the scripts were dragging and again, these were some useless characters.

'The White Elephant' – (sigh) Pass!!

'Stone soup' was again a bit confusing but that is what it is all about, I want to ask Sengupta, was this real life in a fantasy land or the real world with (just a little) chewing gum wanting tails and aliens. Fascinating!

Dearest readers, by reading this you may not want to buy this book, but don't go by my word. It is everyone's opinion that counts. To top it off, I would give this book an 80%. Also, the recommendation for the lighting, cast, crew etc. is very inspirational and interesting and by reading about what goes into acting, I got butterflies in my own stomach!!

Good Heavens! is a wonderful book. Well done!

Anhad Hindal Class VIII, Vasant Valley School, Delhi.

Sally Bourne

GHOST STORIES
Edited by Geeta Dharmarajan
Katha Pocket Plus, pp.63, Rs. 75.00

THE MYNA FROM PEACOCK GARDEN
By Naiyer Masud. Translated by Sagaree Sengupta.
Katha Pocket Plus, pp. 88, Rs. 95.00

RAJ KAHINI
By Abanindranath Tagore
Katha Pocket Plus, pp. 199 pages, Rs.120.00

THE NIGHT OF THE THIRD CRESCENT AND OTHER STORIES
Edited by Geeta Dharmarajan
Katha Pocket Plus, pp.139, Rs. 95.00

LUKOSE'S CHURCH AND OTHER STORIES
Edited by Geeta Dharmarajan
Katha Pocket Plus, pp.116, Rs. 95.00

Ghost Stories is a book which tells stories with a touch of mystery and suspense. 'The Lady of the House' is about a young ayah, called Malina, who comes to work in the house of Ginnima. Ginnima is an old lady, who has been trapped in her bed for 55 years, because she is overweight. When she first meets the old lady, something about Ginnima's eyes scares Malina, because she feels like she is being trapped.This is a scary story. 'The Blue Light' is about a man, who searches for the perfect house to live in. He thinks he has found it and moves in. The postman tells him that the house is haunted by Bhargavi, a women who threw herself into a well because of unrequited love.Is he afraid?Read on to find out if the house is haunted.

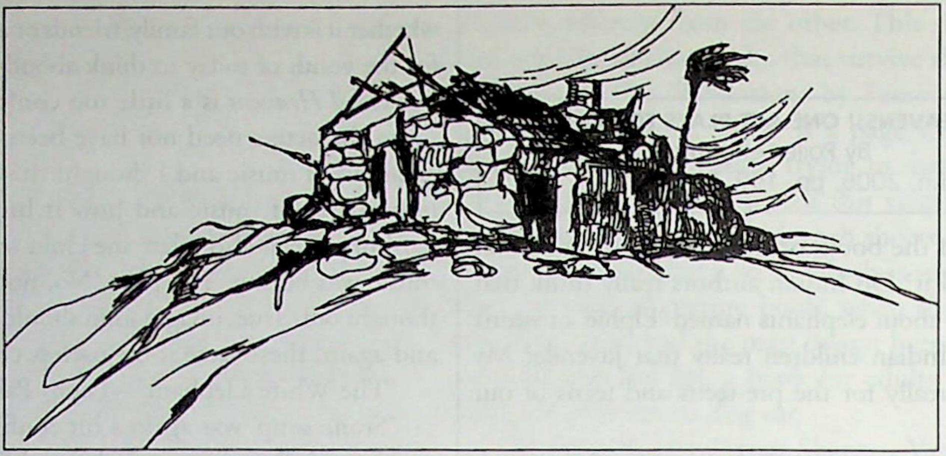
'Maya Mriga' is about two boys, Shah and his friend. Their music teacher tells them that there are spirits in the graveyard. They don't believe him but they decide to go at night and check it out. It is an adventure story with a difference. 'Clap Trap' is about Stan Fernandez, who has dreams of becoming a musician. When he grows up he starts a band called West Coast Light Music Sestet. The trouble starts when they are invited to perform in the city.

The Myna from Peacock Garden is a story about Kale Khan and his daughter Falak Ara. Kale Khan resigns from his old job because he has to look after his daughter and needs more money. His wife has died. He gets a new job working in the Peacock Garden, belonging to the Badsah. He likes looking after birds. His wife had always wanted a hill mynah and so does his daughter. They are very expensive though so they could never afford them. The Badsah gets 40 hill mynahs. Kale Khan buys a cage for his daughter and brings a hill mynah from the aviary to put into the cage at home. Nobody realizes one is missing. The story unfolds to reveal the troubles Kale Khan goes through. It is a very good story and tells how much a father will do for his daughter. The author uses a lot of detail to paint a picture in your head. The illustrations are beautifully done and show the story in drawings wonderfully.

The Night of the Third Crescent and Other Stories is a good collection with stories ranging from funny stories like 'Umpiring', about a traditional cricket game between two states, refereed by an MP, who lays down his own rules to sad stories like 'The Rogue', about a wild elephant hunted by poachers, that seeks help from a young man and 'Miriam's Letter', about an old man, who comes to the post office every morning waiting for the letter from his daughter, which will never arrive ; 'Wings', about a girl, who after guests come to stay at her house, realizes that her situation and future life is as much out of her hands, as it is for one of the guests; to amusing stories like 'Night of the Third Crescent' about a girl who hears music in the wind one night and realizes it is in her soul and 'Unnikatha', about a boy who tells his grandmother a short story (unnikatha) each night, to send her to sleep; 'The Horse Who Was a Friend of Grass', about a horse, who was trying to prove to humans that he could be a friend of grass and not eat it and 'Mangamma the Curd Seller', about Mangamma who sells curd and tells her favourite customer about her life; to life stories like 'Reflowering', about a blind man, whose sole talent is mental arithmatic and he is allowed to get away with a lot because of it, until a calculator arrives and he is forced to create a new niche for himself in life.' Zero-Sum Game' is about how a small incident can be blown up into something huge, depending on how bored people are at the time, until the whole situation becomes a farce. All the stories were well written and got you into the mood of the story. I am glad some of these were translated because other-

wise I would not have had the chance to read them.

Raj Kahini detailes the various legends of the royal families of old written in an imaginative way, Tagore describes the way in which they lived, married and died. The women do not seem to play a very important part in the stories, except as mothers, sisters or daughters. It also got a bit confusing when the kings travelled around and married different women in different cities. All the stories were fascinating and the sons all growing up to take their rightful places was a victory for the good. My favourite story was Shiladitya, because it deals with strong, quiet devotion Any wrongdoing by the characters in the books however was explained away by the fact that it was destiny, which I think was wrong. I also liked the confusion in the story of Bappaditya, who does not know who he is and has to go through practically his whole life until he finds out. . Strength and honour is what was considered the ideals at that time and this book has plenty of that.



I really enjoyed all the stories in Lukose's Church and Other Stories and I was glad they have been translated. There were funny stories, sad stories and all the genres in between. 'Fifteen' was probably my favourite.The two main characters are real drama queens. There is love under the nose of one of them, but they are so busy living in the fantasy world they have created, that they miss out on it altogether. 'The Medal' was a sinister story and it is very creepy reading it. I kept thinking something was going to happen and it kept the suspense up very well. 'A Brown Man' I enjoyed the least, because he has a very warped idea of what is acceptable. Just because you are being stared at doesn't always mean it is in a mean or freakish manner. Sometimes it is just because you are different and people have to get to know you. Because of his narrow-minded views he loses out and I was glad. 'Lukose's Church'" was a story of quiet, relentless devotion. It is unusual in one so young and I was impressed with his fortitude. 'Lagadu Parab's Ashwamedha"'was very interesting. He is so busy trying to create a good impression, and worrying about what others are thinking, that he makes a real mess of things. The unexpected ending was very funny and I enjoyed it. 'Hearts of Oak' was a brilliant story. The honour and steadfast bravery of these men against all odds was awe-inspiring. Country did not matter, they worked together to fight a common enemy. Wonderful story. 'The Broker' was very sad. In the beginning you really hated him and by the end you pitied him because there was no way out. 'Secrets' was kind of sad, but you were never sure whom you felt sorrry for. The grandchild obviously liked being with her grandparents but was made to feel that her mother was not welcome. The way the grandfather referred to his daughter-in-law in front of her was not nice. It is good that her father sent her away at that time. The child's mother obviously realised the bond that the child had with her grandparents and helped her but the family was missing out the whole time because of the tension between the grandfather and the daughter-in-law. 'Pinti's Sabun' was a story with a very clear moral. Don't be selfish and covet something because someday that thing might vanish. Then you will be left all alone if you are not careful. All the stories were ve.y interesting to read.■

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Books-in-Brief

Books-in-Brief

BELLY FLOP AND WATER WINGS
By Morris Glietzman
Macmillian Children's Books, 2006, pp.323, £3.40

SIXTH GRADE: GLOMMERS, NORKS, AND ME
By Lisa Papademetriou
Hyperion Paperbacks for Children, 2006, pp. 217, $4.75

SING A SONG OF TUNA FISH
By Esm? Raji Codell
Hyperion Paperbacks for Children, 2006, pp.133, $5.25

Belly Flop and Water Wings is about a boy whose family is hated by the town in which he lives, because his father is a bank officer, and even though he hates it he has to write reports about which farmers hadn't paid back their loans because of the 8-year long drought in the area. So a lot of farmers get kicked off their land, and everyone starts hating him and his family. The boy, Mitch, tries (but in vain) to get the town to understand them but it always ends in disaster. Mitch believes he has a guardian angel, because of what his gran had told him long ago. But, in the end, he actually does win the town's approval. This is a book worth reading for everyone.

Sixth Grade: Glommers, Norks, and Me is about a girl who has just passed into middle school and has a whole new life and has rediscovered all her old friends. Girls will like this book. I don't want to say more, because it would spoil the book for readers, but this is a nice, well-written book.

Sing a Song of Tuna Fish is a nice and well written book about writers experiences when she was young. The author describes all her pranks very well. Needless to say this is a well-written, humorous book, which 8-10 year olds will enjoy.

All these books are very nice (and on completely different topics) and will give at least an hour each of reading (by my standards). The only problem I found was that all of them were too short. But then, I say that about every book I read!

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the emergence of modernism in Tamil fiction, the omission of Mauni's (S. Mani) name is a serious omission. Mauni was concerned with the '*aham*' or interior landscape of the Tamil psyche while Pudumaipithan looked at the glaring social anomalies in the '*puram*' or exterior landscape of Tamil norms and elite brahmanical values. Therefore in terms of literary innovation I would place Mauni·on a par with Pudumaipithan. Where Pudumaipithan's writings have a central location is in the context of the entire Dravidian movement which was stridently anti-Sanskritic and anti-brahmanical. Seen in this light Pudumaipithan was a pathbreaker only if one were to hegemonize brahmanical values as the prevailing norm of colonial Tamil Nadu. He was, in other words, truly representative of the Dravidian voice that had gathered momentum first under Maraimalai Adigal and Neelambikai Ammaiyar and later under Periyar E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker.

Essays seven and eight in Venkatachalapathy's collection take up specifically the theme of the Dravidian movement. The author contests the perception of the Dravidian movement as a Vellalar caste dominated movement. In this chapter and in the subsequent one titled 'Coining Words' which deals with the politics of language in colonial Tamil Nadu, the author looks at the expunging of Sanskrit terms from the Tamil lexicon and the need to have a scientific vocabulary that would move out of the Anglo-Sanskrit language bind. The two chapters enable us to perceive the conjunctions and the disjunctions between the *Tani Tamizh Iyakkam* of Maraimalai Adigal and the *Svaya Mariyadai Iyakkam* of Periyar. Both were equally loud in their proclamations of anti-brahmanism but both were deeply divided in their socio-cultural outlook. The votaries of the *Tani Tamizh Iyakkam* were deeply religious and committed to the Saiva Siddhanta philosophy while Periyar perceived religion itself—whether Tamil or Sanskritic, whether brahmanical or Dravidian—as antithetical to Tamil culture. Periyar's movement called into question the very religiosity which lay at the foundation of the Tamil psyche (p.129). While the journal *Ooliyarn* strongly criticized the essays in Periyar's *Kudi Arasu* saying "That such acts should be done in the name of non-brahmin struggle is a shame to those who call themselves non-brahmins" (p. 130), the Self-Respect movement lobby dubbed the Saivite conferences of the *Tani Tamizh Iyakkam* as a "Brahmin conspiracy" (p.130). While reading these chapters one could not help sensing the author's own admiration for Periyar and his ideology. However while sharing Chalapathy's admiration (which inevitably peeps through time and again) for Periyar and his struggle for social justice one must draw the author's attention to recent political movements which see Periyar's reform movement as a half-way house. The upper-caste/upper-class composition of the Dravidian movement (excluding the brahmins of course) has been pointed out again and again by the Adi Dravidas (now termed dalits) whose interests, they believe, lay outside the ambit of the Self-Respect movement. This perception of the Adi Dravidas in fact goes back to the early decades of the non-brahmin movement when the Panchamas (as the Adi Dravidas came to be known) began to seek an independent political and social identity for themselves. In order to seek social justice for the lowest social castes in Tamil society they formed associations called Adi Dravida Jana Sabha and Pariah Mahajana Sabha. Initially the Adi Dravidas tried to work within the ideological framework of the non-brahmin movement during the nationalist struggle but eventually split from the upper caste non-brahmins because their interests were not being taken into consideration. This was especially true of the Justice Party which was predominantly composed of the intermediate upper-caste non-brahmins. The Adi Dravidas have continued to agitate for their rights and for corrective justice in the post independence period essentially through newly emerged political parties like Puthiya Tamizhagam, Pattali Makkal Katchi etc. In the light of historical logistics, Chalapathy perhaps needs to rethink his unqualified praise of the 'Self-Respect Movement' as 'radical', 'egalitarian' and 'democratic'.

I would like to conclude this review of a most absorbing book with two very divergent essays—'Street Smart in Chennai' which is the fourth essay in the collection and 'Excising the Self' which is the final essay. The Chennai piece focuses on petty cheating in the newly founded metropolis. While this is a journalistic piece in the lighter vein, what is missing here is a sociological analysis of the castes Chalapathy refers to as thieving/cheating castes such as the Kuravar, the Kepmari etc. Quite a few of these were identified by the British administration as 'Criminal Tribes'. The phenomenon of female possession still continues to be associated with these tribes and such soothsayers are much sought after by the Tamils. A more nuanced analysis of the material and greater use of Company reports on identification of criminal tribes and the law would have made this essay valuable to the social historian. The last essay provides a textured analysis of the interface between autobiography and history in the context of the colonial Tamils.

I would finally likely to quote Chalapathy's own statement that 'a history not worth reading is barely worth writing' (Series Editor's Foreword, xx). Chalapathy's book is worth possessing and reading over and over again, a must for cultural historians and highly recommended to others for sheer reading pleasure.■

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New Trends in Tamil Reading

Indira Parthasarathy

NILAMMELLAM RATHTHAM
By Pa. Raghavan
Kizhakku Pathiippakam, Chennai, 2006, pp. 700,

In the recent past there is an appreciable rise in the number of books published in Tamil on national and global issues. That such books have a good market augurs well for the future of Tamil. And who are the readers of these books?

The last few decades of the last century found a new class of readership that was recently empowered by education but that still lacked an adequate knowledge of English, the language of intellectual dialogue internationally. And yet, these new readers were thirsting for knowledge and wanted to know all that was happening around them near and far. Their expectations were not belied and books dealing with a variety of issues started appearing.

The new readership transcended the caste hierarchy. No longer were reading and writing the monopoly of the upper classes and the new young writers belonging to the oppressed sections of the Tamil society wrote books in simple and elegant Tamil, on various subjects to educate and quench their fellowmen's intellectual thirst. The dalit writers wrote especially about the Afro-American social awakening in America and brought the problem home by comparing their own plight in a caste-ridden society in India. The stories of the Black Panther movement, Nation of Islam in the US and the dalit awakening in Maharashtra and Karnataka were published in Tamil. Lives and teachings of leaders like Dr. Ambedkar, Mahatma Phule and the scholarly and indefatigable but nationally not so well-known Tamil dalit leader Ayodhya Das were retold. It was a revelation for many that this redoubtable eminent scholar, Ayodhya Das had thought far ahead of his times and reflected on the problems of dalits in a manner almost in consonance with our contemporary thinking. Dr. Ambedkar's books which were translated and published in Tamil ran into several reprints. This new reading and writing brought a tremendous awareness and robust optimism in the minds of the socially disadvantaged that were never there before.

True, it was Subramania Bharati, the father-figure of modern Tamil poetry who initiated this movement of enlightening the not-so-well English educated Tamils about global issues. Unfortunately there are not as many takers for his equally remarkable prose writings as for his brilliant poems. Bharati was a visionary. He welcomed the Russian revolu-

> The conventional publishing houses of pure literary fiction have started bringing out books of non-fiction on subjects of varied interests to meet the demands of the readers. Religious texts are reprinted, not out of any religious fervour but because they provide socio-anthropological clues to studying the past society with historic objectivity.

tion just after fourteen days of its happening, perhaps the first Indian writer to have done so. He soon got disenchanted with it as many thousands of people were eliminated in the name of revolution, about which he did not hesitate to express his anguish and sorrow in no uncertain terms. The god had failed for Bharati two years after the revolution which was much earlier than for many of the western liberal intellectuals. He also wrote about the freedom struggle of the Irish people and made an in-depth study of this issue comparing it with our own problems with the British. It was only V. Swaminatha Sarma who after Bharati had such an international vision. He wrote about economics, social history and published in Tamil translations of the philosophical treatises of Plato and Aristotle. He was discovered only during his recent centenary by many Tamils, including the State Government which nationalized his works as a part of the centenary celebrations. It was during the last three decades of the twentieth century that national and international issues started becoming visible thanks to the untiring efforts of emerging young minds.

It would be a rich and rewarding experience to know what are the types of books published in 2005-' 06 to get an idea of this new trend. Non-fiction literature especially covering the field of culture, society and politics is now more in evidence than literary fiction. Biographies of news-making world leaders like Fidel Castro, Hugo Chavez and a host of others get published. An eminently readable book tracing American history, its dominance and arrogance of power in a unipolar world has seen several reprints within a short period. Another book narrating the history of Islam, a refreshing study dispelling many of the popular misconceptions about this religion is one of the bestsellers. Besides these issue-based books, there are many Tamil translations of the world classics in literature and other disciplines.

The conventional publishing houses of pure literary fiction have started bringing out books of non-fiction on subjects of varied interests to meet the demands of the readers. Religious texts are reprinted, not out of any religious fervour but because they provide socio-anthropological clues to studying the past society with historic objectivity. A conventional publisher of prose fiction has recently published a compendium of the four Vedas including the *Upanisads* told in a very contemporary idiom. It is also a great surprise that these books are not published keeping only the public libraries in mind but it looks like the number of individual buyers of books in Tamilnadu has increased to a great extent. It was not so a few years before, when the publishers often claimed that, by and large, that the Government libraries constituted their clientele. Buying classical Tamil books to maintain a personal library has now become the avowed objective of young readers, a welcome trend these days.

The young forward-looking young publishers are now catering to this new trend. They invite young writers to write on all new subjects that have never been touched upon before and the quality of production of these books is comparable with the best in the country.

Among the issue-based books published recently the one that caught the attention of a very large of number of readers, in spite of the fact that it dealt with a complex problem and a voluminous book at that running to 700 pages, was *Nilamellam Raththam* ('Bloodied land' in free translation) written by Pa. Raghavan and published by Kizakku Pathippakam, a new concern that has brought out nearly 200 titles on a variety of subjects within two years of its existence.

The complex problem this book has attempted to study is the Middle East crisis, more specifically, the Palestine issue, its genesis and the contemporary situation. The book addresses a lay Tamil reader who is willing to learn. And for this, complex issues need to be told in the simplest manner possible and to hold the reader's sustained attention in the subject it should be narrated in the most interesting way and precisely this is what the author has done.

Going back in history and pre-history, the narrative starts with the story of Abraham, the common ancestor mentioned in all the three desert religions.

> The problem between the Jews and Arabs started with the way Abraham treated his sons Ishmael and Isaac, the former son of Hagar, his second wife and servant and the latter, son of Sara, his first wife. Ishmael and his mother were thrown out of the house to wander in the in the wild desert while Sara and her son stayed at home. Ishmael was the progenitor of the Arabs and Isaac started the Jewish lineage. Story or history, this could as well be a metaphor to describe the origin of the conflict between the Jews and Muslims.

This is how the author begins to narrate the story.

The Palestinian problem cannot be properly put in place unless in the context of the story of these three religions, Judaeism, Christianity and Islam. Raghavan gives a chronological survey of the religions which is as interesting to read as a novel, which, in fact, is his natural territory. The emotional hold of Jerusalem for all of them in the backdrop of history is beautifully brought out by him. No part in the historic details in regard to this sentimental story is left untouched by Ragahavan. Herod's rebuilding of the temple earlier constructed by Solomon that fell into ruins, the prediction of Jesus that the temple would again be destroyed, the atrocity of the Roman commander Titus in bringing down the temple in a fit of rage, the occupation of Jerusalem by the Muslims during the period of Caliph Umar, its capture by the Christians during the Crusades, its reclaim by Salaludin in the 16th century and its being under Muslim rule for 400 years till the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1919 after the First World War—all these events are vividly described by the author.

It is ironic that the Jews in Palestine felt more comfortable under Muslim rule than the Jews in Europe who had migrated there several centuries earlier. But they had always been aspiring for a homeland. The brilliant idea of Theodor Herzi to start a Land Bank exclusively for giving loans to such of those Jews who wanted to buy land for agriculture or settlement worked miraculously. Before the lazy Arabs could understand what it was all about, the Jews in Europe and elsewhere started taking loans from this bank to buy land in Palestine. Without giving a thought to why they were buying arid land, the Arabs sold their land for what they thought brought them huge profit. Soon by the end of the First World War, there was a sizeable number of Jewish population in Palestine owning four and a half per cent of the total area. The Europeans, who did not want a homeland for the Jews in Europe, decided to favour the idea of a separate territory for them in Palestine, which always had been their sentimental home from the days Abraham!

During the First World War came what was known as the Balfur Declaration. Lord Arthur Balfur was the Foreign Secretary in Britain at that time and the Declaration said that 'His Majesty's Government views with favour the establishment in Palestine of a Nation Home for the Jewish people.' It also promised to safeguard 'the civic and religious rights of the non-Jewish people' when once the Jewish homeland became a reality. Britain, soon after the war, under whose authority, Palestine lay, did not hesitate to accept all the Jews who

migrated there from the world over to play the number game of ethnic majority. Even earlier, the Jews had occupied Palestinian lands under the Theodor Herzi plan. The Balfur Declaration was mischievous in assuring 'the non-Jewish people' (in fact it was Arabs who constituted the majority and it was their political right to be in that country) 'their civic and religious rights'.

After the Second World War, the western powers did not wait for a moment in partitioning Palestine to create a homeland for the Jews, which they called, 'Israel'. It was not a solution but the beginning of a new crisis with new issues involved leading to a situation when the whole population of Palestinian Arabs were rendered homeless only to become exiles in different countries. It would be interesting to give Gandhiji's views in this regard, which Raghavan has quoted at length. 'I have my sympathy for my Jewish brethren, who have enough suffered in history. In Europe for the last several centuries they have been treated in the same manner as we did our own children of God, the untouchables. But I cannot reconcile with their asking for a separate homeland at a place from which they have migrated several centuries earlier. They have settled down in several countries and they are their native countries and they should fight for their political and religious rights to live there and practise their way of living. Palestine belongs to the Arabs undeniably'.

On 29th November the UN Cell for Palestine announced its recommendation that Palestine should be divided into regions, one constituting the homeland for the Jews. It also suggested that as Jerusalem was a disputed territory it should be under the UN control. This paved the way for violence in Palestine. On April 9th 1948, at Deir Yassin, a village near Jerusalem, 254 Arabs were massacred by Jews belonging to two terrorists groups called Irgun-Stern. When things were getting hotter between the Arabs and Jews, the British Government decided to withdraw from Palestine and also announced the birth of a nation called for the Jews as recommended by the UN cell. The US was the first country to recognize Israel. In 1948-49 after the Israel-Palestinian Arabs' conflict, Israel occupied most of the Palestinian territory, 56 per cent more than what was recommended by the UN cell.

After the Suez war Israel occupied the whole of Gaza. In 1957, Yaasar Arafat founded The Al Fata movement to fight with Israel, which, later came under the umbrella organization called PLO that united all the fighting groups. After the six-day war in 1967, Israel, set up Jewish camps in East Jerusalem and later in 1980, occupied it totally. After a stiff fight in 1988, PLO announced that the West Bank was under its control and and declared an Independent Palestine, which was recognized by 55 countries including Russia and China. Peace talks between Israel and Palestine were initiated by Norway and in 1993 Yaaser Arafat and the Prime Minister of Israel Rabin signed a peace treaty for which they were awarded the Nobel Peace prize later, though it was only a brief cessation of hostilities between these two countries.

The author says that with the death of Arafat in 2004, the Palestinian Arabs are rendered leaderless. History started repeating itself and there is a sense of *déjà vu* in Israel attacking Lebanon to contain the Arab terrorists.

Raghavan has left no detail regarding this issue which looks like it is going to be a permanent conflict with brief intervals of peace. It is an extremely well-written book, marked by a balanced outlook and simple and sharp style that unfolds the problem like a drama, perhaps, a Greek tragedy.■

Indira Parthasarathy is a well-known writer and critic.

Far Reaches of the Ocean

N. Kalyan Raman

AAZHI SOOZH ULAGU (THE OCEAN-RINGED EARTH)
By Joe D'Cruz
Thamizhini, Chennai, 2004, Rs. 265.00

Aazhi Soozh Ulagu, the title of the novel under review, is an exquisite phrase from Kamban's *Ramayanam* (*circa* 12th century CE), which occurs in Kaikeyi's exhortation to Lord Rama before he is sent away into exile for fourteen years. 'All of this ocean-ringed earth is Bharathan's to rule,' declares Kaikeyi, while Rama must travel into the jungle to undertake 'intolerably arduous' penance, live austerely and bathe in the waters of hallowed pilgrimage cen-tres, before returning home in two times seven years. In a contemporary reworking of this meta-phor, playing on the multifarious meanings of '*ulagu*', the title of this debut novel by Joe D'Cruz, refers to the ocean-ringed world of a community of fishermen in a coastal village south of Tuticorin in south Tamilnadu. The vastness of the ocean, which provides daily sustenance and brings death in unpredictable ways, is the back-drop of the narrative in which awesome and tragic destinies of men, women and children are played out on the sands, in the briny air and on the unplumbed ocean over five decades—from 1933 to 1985.

In a sombre note prefacing the novel, the author recalls being the altar boy at a funeral service in the local parish church for a fisherman whose life was lost at sea. "A black cloth draped over the coffin placed centrally on a table inside the church had these words printed on it: Today, it's my turn; tomorrow, it'll be yours". "I began to observe the nature of Death", he writes, "with fear, and eagerness". "When the path through which life commenced was the same for all living creatures—equal in birth—how various were the ways in which Death came to us! What is this great force of Death, which shall never be conquered, trying to teach us?"... "Every question that emerges from my experience of life invariably ends up as a very simple query: What is life worth in the face of Death?" D'Cruz wrote his debut novel as a means to explore this question.

On July 17, 1985, three fishermen belonging to three different generations—Godhra Pillai, Susai and Siluvai from Aamandhurai village—are stranded in mid-ocean while on a routine fishing expedition. Slowly, as the days and nights pass, it becomes more and more certain that they will all die. The story of their struggle—marked by tenacity, generosity, resourcefulness, love of the ocean with its awesome variety, splendour and spectacle, and terminal heroism—is told in sections interleaved with the larger story of the community itself. Its cast of characters spans all generations and ages, its gods and demons, its ecology of local and village feuds, caste prejudice and enterprise, love and dreams of a better life, and Death—especially Death which touches them randomly but with a sure hand. In the closing section of the novel, Siluvai, the youngest of the marooned, an orphan in his early twenties, survives the ordeal, rescued by a passenger ship off the coast of Tuticorin.

There are no individual heroes or even protagonists in *Aazhi Soozh Ulagu*. Truly, it is the narrative of a community's life told refracted through the lives of its people, the near and far events of history, and of course, through the great unconquerable force that determines so much of how they live and die. For a first-time author, Joe D'Cruz has an impressive mastery of the novelist's craft, a sparkling style and deep reserves of empathy for his characters. Being of the community, he brings us awesome descriptions of the sights, sounds, creatures and even moods from the far reaches of the ocean with confident knowledge and exceptional powers of description. His evocation of the forlorn air and poverty of a coastal village, of the follies and wisdom of its people, is simply brilliant. D'Cruz captures every nuance—of land, air, water, god and the devil—and it is hard to think of a recent novel in which so many different voices and people in various stages and walks of life are rendered with such perfection of detail. His people live in a world where their religious practices segue seamlessly into that of the Hindu world surrounding them; where their adopted religion does not free them from the divisive brutality of caste prejudice; where the Church alternately nurtures and exploits, offering the one true dwelling for their faith; and where mobility into the larger world—to Ramesh-waram, Kanyakumari, Colombo, and around the world as merchant sailors—wreaks several kinds of havoc with their lives. For all the awareness of Death which sings through the novel like a melancholy dirge, there is a poignancy and con-trolled pathos to the narrative, along with a stead-fast dignity. Vannanilavan's classic novel of the seventies, *Kadalpuraththil* (In a town by the sea), sharing a similar setting, was imbued with the same poignancy; but turning on romantic love, it now seems much narrower in scope and perhaps less authentic, even, than *Aazhi Soozh Ulagu*.

Beyond bearing testimony to the author's literary skills and accomplishments, the novel is significant for several reasons at this juncture in our national and literary life. There are few novels being written in India today which use the possibilities of this form to traverse a wide swathe of the social world, touching on the myriad dimensions of individual and collective life. Perhaps this is due to the inexorable limitations of imagination and experience on the part of the writers; or because more and more of our writers are pushed into straitened petit-bourgeois circumstances, from which they are constrained to produce art; or because it is no longer possible for writers, in the normal course, to have sustained contact with or interest in the larger community; because, just as large sections of the populace are simply dropped over the edge—forever out of the reckoning—of a globalizing economy, these sections are also increasingly moved beyond the ambit of cultural production, denied admission into a public space where they would be honoured by acknowledgement, attention and concern.

However, expansion of educational opportunities in recent decades has moved large sections of the people of India into the world, literally, of letters. For the very first time, whole communities, hitherto marginalized, now have the means to put together their own narratives, create literary expressions of their own culture and politics; and in brief, to declare their own sense of the universe. This is perhaps a possibility unique to Indian language literatures, with some linguistic communities racing ahead of others in this respect. The Fernando community of Tuticorin—whose most famous son was J.B. Chandrababu, a genius figure of Tamil cinema of the fifties and sixties—can now find a place in the Tamil imagination; so can 'Siluvairaj', a scholarly dalit, from a village in drought-prone Ramanathapuram district. For a society with a long and shamefully persistent history of stratification and abuse, such developments can only be emancipatory. After all, it was more than eighty years since the first Tamil novel that a narrative of the social world of Muslims—the first 'Muslim' novel, if you will—saw the light of day (*Oru Kadal Ora Gramathin Kathai*, by Thoppil Mohammed Meeran) although Muslims have been living in the region for centuries.

These novels—and communities—also lay claim to the Tamil language, among the most famously diglossic languages in the world, with all its history and literary legacy. D'Cruz's novel is dotted with celebratory references to fishermen's communities (*Bharathavar)* in Sangam poetry as epigraph and chapter headings. In a sense, *Aazhi Soozh Ulagu* restores to the author's community what was always theirs and will be forever. The novel also documents and makes accessible for the first time the age-old nautical terminology of sea-faring Tamil communities; it restores to us the Tamil names of different species of fish found in our coastal waters, while describing for us how they look and move and live in the ocean.

During the debate on reservations earlier this year, D. Raja, General Secretary, Communist Party of India, wrote in *The Hindu* (paraphrase mine): "These children are fighting against reservations, calling it unfair. There are people in our country who have suffered two thousand years of unfairness, which is our history. This history should be taught in our schools, so that people do not have the wrong idea of unfairness." In another way, Pascal remarks in *Pensees*: "There are those who would never have loved had they not heard speak of love." What better way to acquire this knowledge than through works of imagination. This new flowering of Indian-language literature may bring us such critical knowledge and take us that much closer to that farthest frontier for us all, democracy itself.■

N. Kalyan Raman is a Bangalore-based translator of contemporary Tamil fiction and poetry.

The All-Seeing Eye of the Mole

N.S. Jagannathan

MOLE!
By Ashokamitran. Translated from the Tamil by N. Kalyan Raman
Orient Longman, Delhi, 2005, pp. viii+161, Rs. 185.00

"It took me more than ten years to give shape to this work of fiction ..... The nearest form to this narration (which is somewhat new to Tamil letters) is the novel. It has a hero, a scene of action (United States), a period (1973-74)" says Ashokamitran (AM from now on) in his brief introduction to the Tamil original of this work. Ostensibly a travelogue of his some seven months stay at the University of Iowa as a writer in residence that the US government had sponsored as part of its strategy to win Third World intellectual support for itself in the Cold War days, it defies classification as a genre. How much of the book is factual and how much fictional is left tantalizingly in doubt. Actually, this kind of indeterminate genre is becoming increasingly common these days and there is even a name for it: "Faction". AM is in good company.

The work alternates between routine reportage of the quotidian tooings and froings of the eminent writers in different Third World languages taking part in the programme and the low key tensions in relationships among them. The authenticity of these events is deliberately left ambiguous.

Mole! has all the seductive attributes so familiar to readers of AM. An engaging stance of self-deprecating diffidence in authorial interventions; an air of naivete in the narrative manner barely hiding shrewdly observed quirks of character and oddities of the ambience; a "stream of consciousness" narrative mode of cumulative details and submerged humour emerging into throwaway lines are the hallmarks of AM's fictional writing. Where other writers burst their arteries in loud rhetoric to bully the reader into acquiescence, AM is the master of understatement and the art that conceals art. Few writers have been able to capture the extraordinariness of the ordinary as AM. These qualities are very much in evidence in this work.

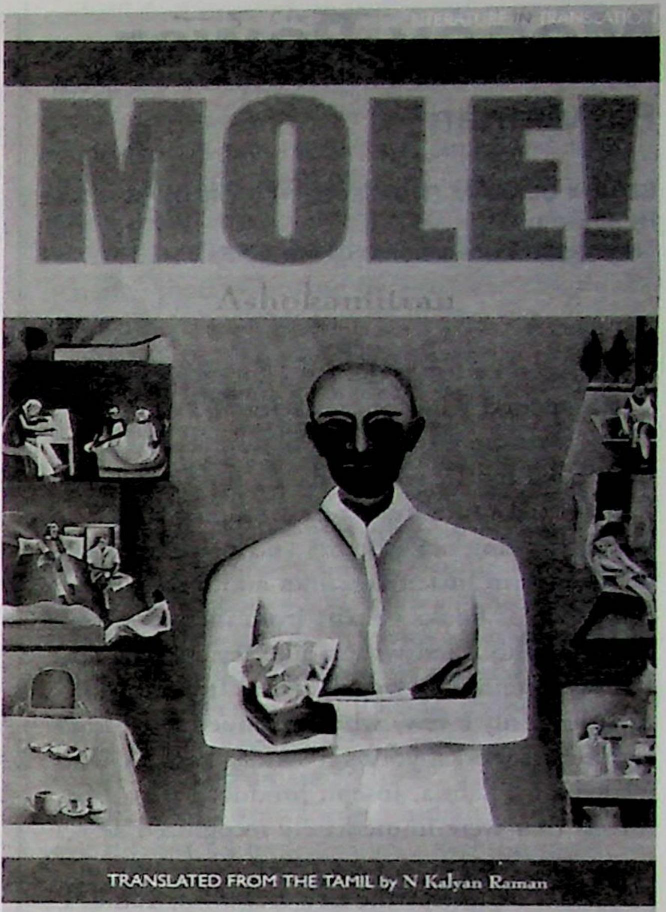
A Tamil brahmin vegetarian used to the easy going standards of social discipline in his own country is suddenly transported into a totally different ambience of a deeply embedded social orderliness. But it is also a world that is far freer in other respects: self consciously libertarian, with no hierarchical inhibitions and permissive of easy familiarity in personal relationships, especially between men and women. Arriving late for this encounter with writers of other Third World nationalities already there, he is quite bewildered in the first few days by the demands of the new ambience. In a way, it is a staid old world confronting a brash new world.

Billetted along with other writers in a huge building called the Mayflower with everything laid on, he finds it difficult to cope with the over-organized life so different from the sloppy and permissive ways of his own country. From opening mechanized letter boxes to finding the sugar packets kept in a bowl for ready use for his coffee (which is undrinkable unlike his "decoction coffee" back home,) he is driven nuts with tension. Underdressed for the winter of an exceptionally cold country, he once falls down on the slippery ground thick with snow and no one comes to help him. Wracked by bouts of homesickness, he makes himself even more miserable by his habitual introspective analyses of his predicament.

Slowly, he learns his lessons in adjustments with the help of sympathetic fellow delegates, discovers K-mart and acquires a strong pair of boots and otherwise becomes acclaimatized physically and mentally to the demands of the new environment. This process is described with engaging humour that lightens his discomfitures both for him and his readers.

The most fascinating part of the novel (if that is what it is) is the large portrait gallery he provides of his fellow members in the programme: Virginia, the fist person he meets on arrival, who tells him that the newspapers stacked by the lift are free and who initiates him to the facilities available for coffee and coco cola in his room; Kajugo, the Japanese writer, who has an extended flirtatious but innocent friendship with him. She has a Texan lover, Martin, a seven-foot tall black American whom she introduces to AM who is pleasantly struck by the easy intimacy of the man. Another important person is Abe Gubegna, the young Ethiopean writer (author of the novel *Mole!* of the title) who clings to AM from the moment he arrives and yet is jealous of him for his supposed love affair with Kajugo (who indeed hates him for unstated reasons.) At one point, Abe knocks him down in jealous fury. He finally leaves Iowa for Washington half way through the programme. Years later AM discovers a reference to *Mole!* in a catalogue picked up at a book fair in Delhi but cannot obtain a copy.

There is then Bravo, the Brazilian writer who has an elaborate chart for novel writing and produces a novel based on it. The two become close friends and have extended conversations on various subjects including South American politics. Bravo shuts himself up to write his magnum opus on the basis of his chart. He talks fondly of his wife back home. She comes to Iowa later in the story but not before AM discovers with a shock that Bravo was having a fling with his stenographer taking down his dictation of his novel. After denying the affair at first Bravo confesses it to AM after the wife's arrival. Incidentally, his novel (which



he later trashes as bad) is entitled *Supermole!*

Yet another engaging character is Ilaria, a young Italian writer, who also attaches herself to AM—the magnetism that draws people to AM is remarkable –and pours out her secrets hopes, fears and frustrations to him. Her father was a bully, her boy friend betrays her and marries someone else and so on. There are many more engaging cameos of the writers-in-residence with whom AM has a certain easy intimacy and spontaneous helpfulness so characteristic of him.

There are also some hilarious episodes such as AM's agonies over the garlic in the fridge placed by his room-mate and the panic he experiences when the assembled writers are made to recite their own poems. AM, who was no poet, gets away with it by reciting from memory the well known poem of Gnanakoothan entitled, 'Just another Day of the Week' that describes with superb irony the antics of a dog that insists on walking in the shadow of a bier undeterred by the kicks of the pall bearers.

Finally, the mystery of the title. Intriguingly, the two brief one sentence references to the *Mole!* and *Supermole !* are never explained The contents of these works are also a mystery. Could it be that the mole is the author, an embedded spy rendering his report to his superiors — the readers of the book?

Kalyan Raman's translation is of rare excellence. It captures with unforced felicity the tonal values of the original Tamil. A test I applied frequently was to recall the Tamil original from time to time and every time I had no difficulty. That is the ultimate test and Kalyan Raman passes it with flying colours.■

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Money Power

Paavannan

EZHAM ULAGAM (THE SEVENTH WORLD): A NOVEL
By Jeyamohan
Thamizhini Publications, Chennai, Rs.150.00

The nineties of the last century saw a second wind of creativity in Tamil writing, particularly fiction. Largely unnoticed by the readers of the pulp magazines that sold in thousands, a new crop of writers were exploring new themes and new areas of experience in little magazines and original work published as books. Apart from the works of already established writers like Jeyamohan, Ramesh Prem, M.G. Suresh and Imaiyam (to mention only a few) who continued to produce significant works, younger writers such as Uma Maheswari, Salma, Joseph produced their first novels that were immediately recognized as important works.

As a sample of the new fiction in Tamil, I shall discuss in what follows the latest work *Ezhaam Ulagam* by Jeyamohan. Jeyamohan is no easy read and calls for close reading. Every novel of his is innovative in its ambience and perspective and experimental in its narrative style and characterization. But running through them all is a profound sense of humanity. For example, in *Vishnupuram*, life in all its variegated aspects, the noble and the ignoble, across centuries, is presented in all their denseness. And it is pulsating life at its best and its worst. In *Pinthodarum Nizhalin Kural* (The voice of the shadow that follows) deals with the violence that is embedded in all that we do in pursuit of the best and ideologies.

Ezham Ulagam thematically quite different from Jeyamohan's earlier novels. Recalling the seventh world in our puranic literature world that he presents here in all its horrendous detail is the world of commerce in human deformity, some of it deliberately inflicted by the entrepreneurs in this nefarious trade. In Jeyamohan's grimly ironic portraiture, this world has all the characteristics of the world of commerce with which we are all familiar—the same money-grabbing avarice with least regard to human feeling or compassion. Children, old men, women all are the stock-and-trade of these entrepreneurs.

Unlike the puranic seventh world, Jeyamohan's is here-and-now and right in the midst of the dark areas of the world we live in. It is the underworld of cheats and swindlers, of liars, murderers and rapists. Its denizens will readily lie for just a rupee without any shame or hesitation. Murders are a regular occurrence. These men will buy and sell handicapped children, mutilate healthy ones, as if they were goats and chicken in a village bazaar. Human life is a commodity that is available in the marketplace. Those who buy them regularly take them to temples during festivals and make them beg. At the end of the day, the money thus earned is turned over to their masters who deposit them in their bank accounts. The whole sequence of transactions is narrated in a deadpan realistic style.

Money is power is the underlying theme of this novel. The centrality of money in our lives has been repeatedly underlined in folk wisdom though the ages and more formally by poets and sages. The great sage Tiruvalluvar wrote that there is no place in heaven for people who do not have mercy and there is no place on earth for people who don't have money. As Ramappan, one of the characters in the novel, puts it, the stomach has to be filled and we need money for it and there are many ways of earning it. Pothivelu Pandaram, the protagonist of this novel, runs a begging business through handicapped human beings of all ages and sizes and shapes from small infants to old women. He diligently collects information about prospective "employees" of this kind. His experience in this line is amazing. He transports physically ruined beggars in a lorry from one temple to another during the peak seasons and earns a lot of money through them. He "manages" the police and locally influential people. He exchanges his beggars with his opposite numbers in other groups without any compunction. The whole thing is run like any big business. However, his personal life is like that of any respectable bourgeois. He has to face many a crisis like any middle-class householder. Marrying off his daughters, for example, is one such problem. Money, whichever way it is earned, comes in useful for increasing his personal amenities. He has to think of acquiring house property and jewellery for his children. Except for the fact that his profession is an unorthodox one, he is like any other money grubbing middle-class upwardly mobile individual. This is what makes it difficult for the reader to be censorious about his activities. His is only one way among many of earning money. Thus do we have a critique of money playing such a central part in the lives of every one in this world? Despite much hypocritical scorn and contempt for money unctuously expressed in our ethical literature, in practice the world does not move without money.

The novel opens with a scene in which the physically ruined Muthamma is about to deliver her eighteenth baby. A village girl is taking care of it. Pothivelu Pandaram is in great tension. Even when his own wife was hospitalized for delivery, he did not have this much tension. It is not just another delivery. He had arranged for a physically ruined man to have sex with Muthamma, expecting a handicapped baby. While waiting for the event, he is constantly praying that the baby be handicapped. A deformed baby is a capital asset for him from which he can make money. Unfortunately, on this occasion, Muthamma realizes

To sum up, this is a novel with many layers of meaning and deserves to be considered as one of the major events in Tamil letters of the last decade.

intuitively that it is her own son she is about to have sex with. The hue and cry she raises is of no avail and she has to go through with it. Pandaram is stubborn in seeing the sexual encounter through. This incident sets the tone of the novel's theme. At the end of novel, there is another incident in which a girl runs away with her lover on the eve of her arranged marriage with someone else. This lover abandons her and she turns a prostitute in an unknown city. There are innumerable such incidents that link the basic theme.

It is interesting to compile the activities of the women characters of the novel. Erukku is one of the female beggars of Pandaram's group. One day, she is taken to the police station and raped by the policemen there. Later she is admitted to the hospital. In order to get her released, Perumal, an agent, claims that she is his wife and to estabiish this lie, he ties a yellow thread as thali around her neck. He manages to bring her out of hospital. Though the whole thing was play acting only to arrange her redemption from the hands of police, the girl herself starts thinking that he is indeed her real husband. He is infuriated and beats her up regularly and she lives through it all.

Vadivammai is the beloved daughter of Pandaram. When her lover abandons her in an unknown city and she turns a prostitute she accepts this situation and there is no complaint in her heart against the man who did all this to her. Though Pandaram's wife had long stopped having sex with him, she has no complaints about the way he runs the begging business through the handicapped and physically ruined people. To her it is just another way of making money. Her respect for her husband does not diminish in her heart. All these three characters are from different strata of society but their attitudes are the same. This is a stark commentary on Indian women's attitude to their husbands.

Among the most interesting things about this novel is the conversations among the beggars. The ultimate meaninglessness of life is the basic tone of these conversations. Jeyamohan is successful in establishing this meaninglessness in every situation of the novel.

To sum up, this is a novel with many layers of meaning and deserves to be considered as one of the major events in Tamil letters of the last decade.■

Paavannan is a well known Tamil writer.

Reaching Out

M. Vijayalakshmi

IN A FOREST, A DEER : STORIES
By Ambai. Translated from the Tamil by Lakshmi Holmstrom
Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2006, pp. 207, price not stated.

When I was told to review Ambai's short stories I refused. Reviewing is tough for me for I am no verbally confident academic with one or more well-earned degrees and the terminology of criticism properly internalized. So all that I can do is to say whether I liked a book or not; and if I did so, to talk about it with a passion to any willing listener. And when I like it a bit too much I cannot and don't like to write about it—for it is beyond me to give shape in words to the many thoughts that swirl inside me in the region of the heart and the eyes too mist every now and then. And I like Ambai.

Almost all of Ambai's fiction has been translated into English which is a good thing. She is without doubt one of the best short story writers in Tamil, male authors included. Not a profuse writer to be boxed into serially numbered tomes, she would have written an average of one and a half stories each year from the early seventies. Totally at home in the Tamil language and the Tamil cultural milieu, she is equally at home outside—'*Yaadum oore yavarum kelir*'—harnessing its power to etch an ideal of transcending, universal humanism. Ambai is not an easy author to translate.Her Tamil has a high energy and verve and a compression with metaphors and allusions aplenty. And plenty of musical descriptions that border on an obsession with snatches of songs and raagas fleeting in and out of every existential moment. Her stories do a hop-skip-and jump or move gently, like the Ganga at Kashi, but inexorably. Some of the stories are also beautifully embellished—all of which has been lovingly and painstakingly translated. If one resists the temptation of picking up the original of this a near-flawless work, even if that act has been done, even then there is too little to carp about. And it is only a good translation that enlarges a writer's readership and ensures his or her place in the writer's community.

And now briefly about my pick of stories from this anthology.

'Journey 1' is the story of a woman travelling long-distance in a bus and returning. The onward journey exposes her to an intentionally un-nappied boy-baby's urine and his sleepy mother's dribble. Her protests have to be muted for she is 'different', with her toned down unadorned appearance her marital and parental certifications not discernible. Here is a whole cultural invasion let loose upon her. She chooses her seat with great care and acquires the company of a young boy on the return journey with a sense of wonderment and innocence of the world about him. The gashes received earlier in the day are more than healed as the journey ends. She is whole, once again.

'Journey 2' is about stumbling upon a certain truth about someone who defies definition as a person. Dinakaran a quintessential Tamil devoted to Tambraparni river and the culinary delights of that region nurtures a certain truth revealed to the narrator like the glimmer of light on the road. It remains sealed between them by a suggestion of a smile.

'The Camel ride' is the sad story of the death of an ageing camel sarred and sick with blood stained nostrils left to perish in one the backlanes near the ciy after giving any number of joy rides on the beach for years. In its last throes, it attracts the attention of the narrator, her 'friend' Yamuna a Tamil-speaking hijra.As a drop of rain falls the camel dies with a final shudder. Yamuna cries out to the cloud in a loud *oppari* or lament for the hapless animal torn away from its own land—a *megasandesam* of a different kind, for a forlorn creature in a steel-grey city.

'Journey 3' is a fun-filled story (and reading it in Tamil is rollicking fun) of those much-savoured childhood moments when 'wrong things' were done conspiratorially by children of an upper-caste household with the low-caste maid servant and her child when they make their annual offerings at the Mariyamman temple, that was socially out-of-bounds for their mother. One year the pilgimage extends itself as a foray into Cinema hall and an exposure to the colourful world of Tamil cinema and the even more colourful and whole-hearted audience participation as the hero forsaking his good woman opts to romance with the vamp. The cat is let out of the bag by the innocent younger brother who blurts out an unexpurgated version of what he heard, much to the mother's consternation!

In Ambai's stories the mother grandmother or aunt are many-faceted talented women who engage meaningfully with life and living. 'Parasakti and others in a soap box' and 'In a forest, a deer' illutrate this amply and in 'Nargis Khala' the last story of the anthology. 'Parasakti' is about the mutifarious and unstoppable community activities of 'Amma' in alien setting that restores and revives a divorced daughter. The story is written almost entirely in the form of two letters, by the two daughters. In the second story talented Thangam Attai played the harmonium, did a hundred chores and told magical tales to the children. A childless woman she reconciles to her position with utter grace. It is the lot of a sleepless child to sense the lone world of Thangam Athai who had that night spun out the story of the lone lost deer in a strange forest. It accepted the strangeness and aloneness and lived 'happily'.

The longer stories include' Wrestling' and 'Forest'. Written at a leisurely pace and in embellished prose they are a good read. The former is the story of a talented musical couple. While the husband performs and earns his kudos the wife sits in the background strumming the tampura despite her superior knowledge and talent. A sensitive disciple sets the matter right at an opportune moment during a performance by moving the microphone before her. The shadow boxing between the couple is atlast over!

'Forest' is a story within a story. The narrator is the wife of a successful entrepreneur in whose progress she had happily unstintingly contributed her talent and labour. But it is not a formally acknowledged contribution nor can she stifle a deep urge to be by herself. She chooses to spend a period of time in a forest by herself. There she is Sita's *Ayana*. The story alternates between the narrator's reminiscences, past and existing, which metamorphoses into Sita's story. It ends with Ravana offering to teach Sita to play the Rudra veena, telling her to take the instrument from his hands. But Sita will pick it up from the ground and will not take it from his hands, never anything from anyone's hands. For the sheer pleasure of reading this story stands out. And the translation is a pleasure.

The last story, 'A movement, a folder, some tears' is the story of three social activists who stake their life-energy for the marginalized driven by the idealism that was unleashed by the freedom struggle. But India of the 90's was a land of unabashed violence especially of the communal variety. Charu Sakina and Selvi are buffetted by the violent strength of the 'emerging' India but Sakina is hit the hardest.(The choice of this name is interesting). Engulfed by a feeling of powerlessness as her own relations turn violently anti-muslim, Charu goes out of the country. Sakina cannot hope for even a toe-hold in the society to just *be* as an Indian, a patriot, a humanist and a universal creature thanks to her name. Her identity as a muslim becomes the first and final marker of her person. A traumatized victim of communal violence and a blood pressure patient, her lot is the hardest.

Selvi's social activism and the odd hours and maverick ways are resented by her well-employed and politically correct daughter. Sakina dies falling from the terrace of a tall building. Selvi cannot accept this death as suicide. She unerringly senses the truth and implements a tough decision. A moving story written with the passionate idealism that will remind the Tamil reader of the Jayakantan of yore. A necessary story to be read in these times.

Is there anything in this anthology that one didn't care for? Not really. The narrative skill of the author is quite perfect and her heart is in the right place, reaching out to the reader with ease…and …the name of Mahasweta Devi kept coming the mind of this reviewer…■

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A Tale of Human Degradation

Vaasanthi

KOOGAI
By S. Dharman
Kalachuvadu Pathippakam, Nagarcoil, 2005, pp. 320, Rs. 175.00

For quite some time now, creative writing in Tamil has been on the high with a vigour and a vibrancy not seen before. The language of Tamil fiction was never more charming; the prose nevermore lilting and rich in vocabulary, or more down-to-earth, assertive and hauntingly aggressive. It is the language of the people, reflected in all its earthy simplicity and glory that brings tears to your eyes. It churns you from inside lighting at once a thousand torches that scorch your conscience and consume you with a sense of guilt. It is like an apparition that overwhelms you as you flip through and then get submerged in the hundreds of pages that are being written and published by new writers, more than a score in number who can easily be spotted as the ones with great promise; extraordinarily talented writers who come from small towns unspoilt by urban 'sophistication'. Writers, men and women who have had humble beginnings, have had their education entirely in Tamil medium. Tamil words fall from their pens like magic, like mantras laden with truths never told before. Thanks to the reservation policy adopted in Tamil Nadu long before any other state could even think about it, there is a sizeable number of dalit writers in Tamil today who write in their dialect with pride and confidence while forcefully depicting the sufferings their people have undergone for centuries, the humiliation they have met with and have still to struggle with to be accepted as equals by fellow citizens. You smell the earth, and feel the pain of humiliation and as you close the book your perception of what suffering and pain have been so long in mundane parlance, will have changed. You have experienced the ultimate of suffering and you have been part of the system that has caused it. And yet, it is no propaganda literature you have been brainwashed with—though some writers of lesser calibre indulge in it; there are no isms; in fact many of them are self critical and analytical without sacrificing the aesthetics. It is stark realism that rises to literary heights because of the newfound language and expression which have come with education and a poetic perception that emanates from the memories of their forefathers who lived a life of shame in silence and also of their own personal experiences and evolution.

S. Dharman is one of the finest of dalit writers in Tamil today. He writes like a visionary with great wisdom even a despicable tale of human degradation and hopeless anguish in a language that hits you and haunts you. *Koogai*, his recent novel, was selected by the Canadian Tamil Literary Association for its annual Best Novel Award.

Koogai is a nocturnal bird almost like an owl but not an owl. It is gigantic and ugly and disinterested in changing its abode. It is strong but uses its strength only when it hunts for its prey. It is blind as a bat during the day and is absolutely helpless when it is pecked at and teased constantly by other smaller birds. It tries to hide itself in the thick branches of the peepal tree or in the hollows of tree trunks. It is forever harassed by other birds with a ferocity that is akin to the Shakespearian 'motiveless malignity' of a villainous Iago. Traditionally, people of Tamil Nadu have looked upon the koogai bird with contempt and considered seeing a koogai or even hearing its hoots as bad omen. It is a bird that is not even widely known.

In S. Dharman's creative imagination, koogai becomes an apt symbol of the dalit community that continues to be taûnted and harassed by the upper castes, BCs and OBCs, rejected and discarded as untouchables for no apparent reason. It is a haunting symbol at once pathetic and helpless; night and darkness are also powerful symbols when koogai regains its sight and strength. It is in darkness that the desperate dalits plot and kill to avenge their humiliation borne in silence for centuries. It is in darkness that they escape in search of light and deliverance. It is in the dark that they can relax and rejoice; can joke and frolic despite hunger and deprivation. As we walk through the lanes of the Pallakudi and Parakkudi where the Pallars and the Parayars live along with the protagonist old man Seeni, a Pallar, the humiliating life story of every inhabitant unfold—each story more outrageous than the other. More degrading than any individual, a non-dalit, can imagine.

To old Seeni, koogai is also a symbol of faith and hope. He believes that it was a koogai that helped and saved him at one point in his shameful life and therefore builds a temple for the bird under the peepal tree, an act that becomes a constant subject for ridicule among the young. They do not realize that to Seeni, venerating koogai is an act of autosuggestion, reclamation of self-esteem, denied by the

Koogai is a nocturnal bird almost like an owl but not an owl. It is gigantic and ugly and disinterested in changing its abode. It is strong but uses its strength only when it hunts for its prey. It is blind as a bat during the day and is absolutely helpless when it is pecked at and teased constantly by other smaller birds.

outside world. He firmly believes it is the bird's blessings that bring them good luck when the kindhearted landowner Nataraja Iyer decides to distribute his lands to the Pallars on lease when he shifts to Chennai. It is a bonanza that the Pallars have never dreamed of. They are as good as owners of the land getting half the share of the produce. They work hard and harvest a rich yield. But not without the jealous angry interference of the others who feel they are superior to them by birth. Every possible method to break their back and spirit is plotted and schemed by the others, but the Pallars are now strengthened by their self-esteem and motivation and therefore under the leadership of Seeni work to thwart all the mischief. Killing those who are sent to target them with murderous intent is no sin and so they dare to kill as a fitting punishment. Again, when the ever-docile Shanmukam kills cop Muthiah Pandian in uncontrolled rage you feel it was coming and inevitable. Because you have watched helplessly the rascally cop enter Shanmukam's house and enquire with inborn arrogance if his wife Karuppi is in, send Shanmukam to the toddy shop to fetch him a bottle and another for himself; Shanmukam meekly walk to the toddy shop while Muththiah Pandian forces himself on a frightened weeping Karuppi while her ten-year old daughter Vellaiyammaa sits outside with head bent; the whole world knows what is going on and no one says a word against the cop as if it is his birthright to sleep with the wife of a low-born. As if the low-born was ordained by fate to be so humiliated—Shanmukam returns with the bottle but Pandian has not finished yet and so Shanmukam thrusts the bottle inside the small opening of the hut and walks back to the toddy shop. But there is a limit to endurance. When Vellaiyammaa comes of age at the age of 13 and Pandian arranges her marriage to a lame scavenger slave so that Pandian may rape the girl too, Shanmukam can take no more. He waits with an *aruval* and breaks the cop's head into two.—But from then on there is no escape from the wrath of the police and the killers

become fugitives running for cover....

Thanks to Nataraja Iyer's benevolence, the Pallars regain their self-confidence; refuse to be bullied by the others. Their pockets are filling, as are their granaries; they plan to buy bikes and bullocks. But success goes to their heads and with it the sense of balance. Division comes with the conversion of some dalits to Christianity. The new converts act superior and discard their own brethren. The non-converts want to build a temple more lavish than the new Church that has been built with funds from foreign missionaries. The Koogai temple is an eyesore and also according to them ridiculous and so they want to propitiate a fittingly powerful God or Goddess in the new temple they decide to build. To Seeni, destroying the Koogai temple would lead them to the end of the road.

Symbolically therefore their world crumbles and they are back to square one when they demolish the Koogai temple and build on its ruins a temple for Kali.

With the destruction of the Koogai temple, the old bonds that kept them together breaks. Seeni is heartbroken and disappears totally from his village. With the loss of unity within the various sections of the dalit community, once again self-esteem is lost. The other communities who have historically harassed them exploit their split. They, who have left agriculture and shifted to matchstick factories and quarrying need help from the Pallars and Parrayars. The people who once tilled and toiled in the fields of their masters now break stones in the quarries of their masters. They lose contact with the soil and alienate themselves further from society having alienated the environment.

Dharman's world is full of fables and fantasies, allegories and symbols. His people decipher the signals of the Gods in the hoots of the koogai, in the shit of the birds, and in the direction of the winds and in the message of their cobwebbed dreams. They seem to be more at home and peace in the company of birds and trees. They are essentially part of the environment with no specific identity of their own. As the wind and the sun are an integral part of environment they too are an integral part of society and are not only unnoticed but also abused. Dharman blames no one but just paints a picture that is real. The author cannot help intruding in between the pages. There is one strong message that he ventures to convey. He cannot help it either. The downtrodden will have to help themselves and not wait for a messiah. United, they rise or they fall—again and again—for the forces against them are centuries old.

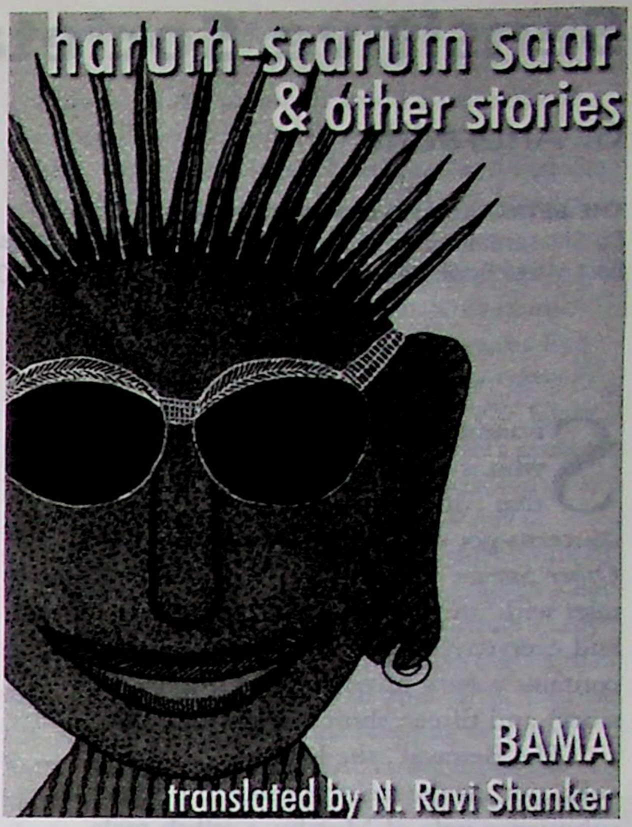
It is not a feel-good story. It cannot be. Dharman's intention is to leave you deeply disturbed. That is exactly what *Koogai* does to you.■

Vaasanthi is a well-known Tamil writer.

A Poignant World

G.J.V. Prasad

HARUM-SCARUM SAAR & OTHER STORIES
By Bama. Translated by N. Ravi Shanker
Women Unlimited, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 105, Rs. 150.00



This collection of ten stories is a testimony to Bama's skills and intent as a writer. Anecdotal in nature, the stories take you almost effortlessly into the lived lives of dalit parayars in Tamilnadu. This is a world that is in the process of change, where the dalits are learning to challenge the hegemonic hold of the landowning castes on them. As Masanam Thatha remarks, in the story "those days", "That's how it was in those days, can't be the same today, can it? No." However, things haven't changed so much that acts of defiance are not the stuff of heroism (or foolhardiness till proved otherwise!). Life carries on as it has for centuries otherwise. There are landlords, and there are workers who toil day and night in order to eke out a subsistence living that they are trained to think is the result of the grace of their masters. The changed times, education and the awareness of social injustice, brings in a different atmosphere into these rural areas, challenging and disconcerting the landlords. The democracy that frames the feudal order now exerts intense pressure on it and its hegemonic caste equations.

However, it is humour and perhaps also the pleasure in hard work that has always kept the dalit community going. It is the women in particular who run the families and keep the community alive and kicking. This is an important motif in Bama's writing, the hard work of dalit women, and the gen(d)eral oppressiveness of their lives. They all, women and men, survive because of the zest for life and this is translated into the earthy humour of their language, their exchanges with each other.

While Bama chronicles the awakening consciousness of the Parayar community, she also unhesitatingly points to their own divisions and oppressions – be it that of gender or of other sub-castes. A story like 'annachi', which came out in a special issue of *India Today*, or one like 'ponuthayi' may thus seem to weaken the dalit plank pointing to the same hierarchical power structures replicated within the community. However, the humour of these indictments, the strength of individual characters and their impact on others, strengthens the position against all hegemonies, specifically against the caste system.

Interestingly in these stories, it is the old or the educated young who challenge the caste system. The ones who no longer care for their future or the ones who care the most for theirs are the ones who raise their voices against the upper-caste landlords. The young men Esakkimuthu in 'pongal', Ammasi in 'annachi', Kaliappan in 'half-sari', are vocal in their condemnation of caste practices and display pride and dignity but so do the older Puthiyamuthu Mama (the harum-scarum saar, the eponymous kisumbukkaran or the mischief maker), Masanam Thatha of "those days", and Malandi Thatha of "an old man and a buffalo". They battle with their wit as well as with sheer courage.

Bama's is ultimately a poignant world, a world that naturalizes inequity and inhumanity. It is in an atmosphere of wretchedness that the characters have to keep their sense of humour and their sense of dignity and humanity. Her character vignettes demonstrate how they manage it as she narrates incidents from their lives, as she lets them tell their stories. If the rich girl Ramayi does not truly understand her circumstances, Pachayamma in 'chilli powder' is a powder keg ready to blow up at all times because she understands her society completely, just like Ponnuthayi who is willing to cut her thali and sell it off to begin a business.

Bama's writing always poses interesting challenges to the translator and she has been fortunate to have been well-served by her translators so far. The ease with which N. Ravi Shanker translates her into Indian English is truly wonderful. The scatological humour of the original gushes forth in the translation as well. Ravi Shanker's choice of lower case for the first letters of the titles of the stories (and thus the book itself) gestures to the irreverence and rebellion inherent in the original stories and their language, but this is negated by the upper case used at the head of each page—something for the publishers to look at in future editions.

A must read.■

G.J.V. Prasad discusses life and literature at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

Sensitive Societal Concerns

G. Anuradha

THE BETRAYAL AND OTHER STORIES
By Sivasankari. Transcreated in English by Ameeta Agnihotri and Geetha Radhakrishnan
East West Books, Chennai, 2006, pp. 230, Rs.150.00

Having read Sivasankari's *Yein, Yetharkaga, Nandu* in serial form in a leading Tamil weekly almost three decades ago, I found it a pleasure to read the English translation of her short stories. While all stories are not of the same calibre, they present an interesting perspective on contemporary issues. A multifaceted personality, Sivasankari's writings examine crisis situations in society and in personal lives in the face of a fast-changing world.

Sivasankari is a well-known Tamil writer who is exceptionally sensitive to the issues that confront contemporary society. Her concerns get reflected in *The Betrayal and Other Stories*, a collection of dexterously woven tales with universal themes, ordinary characters and everyday incidents. This anthology contains a *kuru* novel (a short novel/a long story) and fifteen short stories.

'The Betrayal', the longest one in the collection, is the story of Chandra, the docile, submissive wife of Murthy, a selfish male chauvinist obsessed with sex, in whose opinion an "Indian woman should yield to her husband. His wish is her command. She is there for him to have … as and when he likes…." Murthy, the insatiable glutton, strays and turns unfaithful to his wife while she is busy raising their children. Chandra puts up with his physical and verbal abuse for twenty-five years, until her son Mano finds out the truth. This is the turning point in her life as she emerges a strong, scheming, formidable foe who conceives and carries out a foolproof plan to lay a trap for her husband. Only when he is betrayed and broken does Murthy realize "that his betrayal had come home to roost". A gripping story from beginning to end, what stands out are the special details when the reader is taken into a typical south Indian household and into the daily life of the woman—with the putting out '*vadams*' to dry, making *idlies, uthappams, dosais*, and listening to the *suprabhatam* in the morning.

The other fifteen stories are equally appealing. 'Sleepless–on a butterfly's wing', 'The First Sale', 'Boredom', 'Squirrels and the Guava Fruit' and 'Thorn in the Bed' are reflective in nature. In all these tales, the thought processes of the main characters in observing people or things around them (like a butterfly, a lizard, squirrels, ants, vendors in a marketplace) and getting involved in their being is described vividly. And as we read their observations the gazers are in turn the object of our gaze for the main characters are not just the ones who are observing but the ones who are being observed by the author. Every minute description is focused on them to such an extent that at some point it tests the reader's patience and we want to cut to the chase immediately.

Two of the other stories 'Me and Mine' and 'Be with me Mummy' depict the anguish of children whose mothers are working in offices and are unable to spend time with them. Lest we criticize the author for what seems like a regressive narrative, it must be pointed out that the plots are handled well giving two completely different aspects and shades to this problem.

'Stillborn' and 'A Big Dream and a Small Chisel' fall in the same category of giving us the dream of a marriage and the anticipation of a suitable partner from a female ('Stillborn') and male ('A Big Dream…') point of view. Sarasu has colourful dreams of her prince charming and awaits his arrival patiently. But when Sarasu turns seventeen, financial constraints come in the way of her marriage and when she is thirty, she is rejected because of her appearance. Finally she has to bite back her tears and agree to the marriage proposal of a fifty-five year-old man as she does not want to be a burden to her parents.

'A Big Dream…' is a fresh angle on expectations from marriage, distinct from the usual portrayal of a woman's plight, her shattered dreams, her sacrifices, etc. Here we read about an ideal Husband-To-Be, who saves every penny to provide material comforts for the woman he is going to marry even before agreeing to "see" a girl for marriage. He decides to be helpful and supportive to her in all things. His considerate nature is displayed throughout the narration as he takes pains to decorate the house before her arrival. His world is shattered when immediately after the marriage the girl informs him in a flat, emotionless tone that she is in love with someone else and so he should not build 'foolish dreams in his head' as this marriage has no meaning for her. Either way it seems to lead to deception and disappointment!

Blissful ignorance of modern medical technology can at times be very useful!! I am not joking. Anyone who reads the 'Septic' will agree with this statement. One can feel the underlying sense of humour, though the description of the delivery of a village woman, Mallika, is really gory and gruesome – washing her lower parts with coarsely powdered red brick, putting the hands inside the girl's womb to remove the placenta bits, applying cigar ash on the new- born baby's navel to treat the infection…. The irony of it is the child and the mother survive and they are healthy. At the same time, another woman, Mallika's mistress's sister, living in a big city loses her child due to the same infection in the navel. And Mallika wonders innocently, "Can't it have been treated with a little cow dung or cigar ash?"

The intricacies of the human mind are beautifully depicted in 'Stepney' and 'The Flow and the Ebb', where the seesaw play of feelings present in every one of us flares up and questions us. In 'The Flow and the Ebb' a woman reads an appeal for financial help in a local newspaper and is overwhelmed with compassion for the needy and decides to send Rs 500. The story shows how such bouts of compassion are short-lived and are under the pressure of daily life; slowly as time passes her mind is diverted to other concerns and slowly the amount she is willing to commit declines to nothing. 'Stepney' portrays how we may use other people to fill gaps in our emotional life and drop them when the gap is filled. A mother, whose daughter is away in a hostel, showers affection on a substitute daughter who loses her position as soon as the real daughter returns. A human being has truly been used as a stepney!

Having read Sivasankari's *Yein, Yetharkaga, Nandu* in serial form in a leading Tamil weekly almost three decades ago, I found it a pleasure to read the English translation of her short stories. While all stories are not of the same calibre, they present an interesting perspective on contemporary issues. A multifaceted personality, Sivasankari's writings examine crisis situations in society and in personal lives in the face of a fast-changing world.

Kudos to Ameeta Agnihotri and Geetha Radhakrishnan who deserve special mention for their laudable effort of retaining the native Tamil fragrance in an English translation.■

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A Lament for Hero Worship

K. Satchidanandan

KESAVAN'S LAMENTATIONS: A NOVEL
By M. Mukundan. Translated from Malayalam by A. J. Thomas
Rupa, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 232, Rs.195.00

M Mukundan is the story-teller *par excellence* in contemporary writing in Malayalam. His texts seldom resist reading like those of Anand or O.V. Vijayan often do. He takes the reader into confidence and easily carries him/her along the narrative. Still he does not repeat himself like many popular authors do: he keeps experimenting both with themes and structures, likes to play with space and time and mix reality and fantasy in different measures. His recent works show post-modernist tendencies, being self-reflexive and meta-fictional. *Kesavan's Lamentations*, one of the most discussed novels of the decade in Malayalam, is a good sample of his later fiction that is often a bricolage, a frequency of quotations from different periods and discourses that dissolve the distinctions between biography, fiction and descriptive prose. This is a novel about a novel, both of which break their boundaries and collapse into each other towards the end.

The novel can be read from different perspectives and has already been subjected to multiple readings in Malayalam thus generating a whole debate especially around its political implications. Dr. K. N. Panikkar, the well-known modern historian who has written an interesting preface to the novel in translation finds its central theme to be 'the formation and articulation of the Left political consciousness in Kerala' 'whose focus is on E.M.S. Namboodiripad, who, arguably, exercised the most decisive influence on its course' though he admits it is not a work on or about E.M.S., 'neither a biographical account of E.M.S. nor a representation, faithful or otherwise, of his social and political activism.' The historian however seems to have missed the caustic satire that marks the whole narrative and lends it its special character as an incisively humorous analysis of hero-worship in Kerala. In the process it makes fun of several tendencies in Kerala's social and intellectual life today: the uncritical deification of political leaders, the obsession with the latest western theories, the decadence of left extremism, the pressures of *real-politik* on communist practice, the relationship between cultural institutions and the changing political equations, and the ironies of history in its second incarnation as parody.

The very first sentence sets the tone for the hilarious episodes that follow: "*His father called him Appu. His mother called him Kuttan. And the people...Appukkuttan. Thus it is the people who made him complete.*" This is the opening sentence of the novel, *Appukkuttan's Lamentations*, being written by the popular contemporary writer, Kesavan, woven around the growth of Appukkuttan, an irrational devotee of E.M.S. right from his birth. The irrationality of his admiration for the Marxist leader is evident from the very beginning: Appukkuttan's gaze is fixed on the portrait of E.M.S. while in the cradle. "*It is the redness of that picture that attracted Appukkuttan, lying in the cradle. Apukkuttan grew up lying in the cradle and watching that redness.*" In fact Appukkuttan never grows up; he continues to be obsessed with the picture of E.M.S. He cries when the position of the cradle is reversed as he cannot see the picture, and whenever he cries his mother points to that picture instead of giving him gripewater. "*Appukkuttan would lie moving his little arms and legs, looking at E.M.S's picture. He would talk in his own language to E.M.S. and laugh. As long as he could see E.M.S. , he felt no hunger, no thirst.*" Appukkuttan's father, Ananthakrishnan, is an ex-Naxalite who, according to his wife Sreedevi—who passes away in labour very soon, leaving Ananthakrishnan alone to bring up Appu, as the parents call Appukkuttan—had "*shat in (his) pants encountering the police in (his) so-called attempt at ushering in the revolution.*" He represents many ex-Naxalites in Kerala who later turned into subdued husbands and devotees of some god or the other. Appu wants to listen to no other story than that of E.M.S. wants no better toy than a picture of E.M.S., decides to collect a hundred photos of E.M.S. when he grows up, swears by E.M.S. when he is suspected of taking money from a wallet he finds on the road, reverentially recalls the image of E.M.S. when he takes his examination and longs to become a martyr for the cause of E.M.S. when he grows up. He comes to know the real story of E.M.S. only much later, from Aaman Master, his teacher and elder companion,—who magically enters the novel from the real life of Kesavan—who gives a rational foundation for his otherwise blind admiration, and E.M.S. becomes real to him when he gets a *darshan* of the great leader at Kannoor. He combs his hair like E.M.S. does, and is happy when he has a vision problem and is asked to wear glasses as it takes him closer to E.M.S. in appearance. Appukkuttan goes to pilgrimages to the various places associated with the life and struggle of E.M.S. and finally gets arrested at the tender age of fifteen for killing Saravanan, a loner and a drunkard. This comic dimension continues to the very end when Kesavan, the creator of Appukkuttan himself has a vision of E.M.S who in the typical brahmanical fashion blesses him for having immortalized him in fiction.

Not only E.M.S., but the Marxist party, CITU, the red flag—all become semi-comic motifs in the narrative. Look at sentences like "Kesavan stood cowed like a capitalist unwittingly trapped inside the CITU office", "Only in a socialist set up will there be perfect eyesight for all", "He had vowed an offering of one hundred and one red flags for the Party's District Convention, in return for the favour of uniting him and Kamala in matrimony", "That (red) flag would appear before him in its many expressions. Sometimes it would fly high and taut, as if to vanquish heaven and earth. During the rainy season it was seen hanging wet and limp. On the day of the first rains, drops of blood from the new flag fell on the heads and chests of those who passed below the Party Office without umbrellas", "Kesavan quipped that his chair was arthritic. The trouble was within its joints. Let it tilt either to the left or to the right. Hasn't any kind of tilt become irrelevant after the advent of perestroika and glasnost?", "The tilt of his money was neither to the left nor right. It was always towards the liquor shop", "It was after the Leftist Government came to power that Ravunni, who used to make do with country arrack earlier, had changed over to brandy", "God has given the human race thick skulls in order to protect communists and ex-communists from assaults and attempted assassinations." 'Understand one thing. Eeyyemmes was born in one of the most illustrious families in the highest caste of our land."*"Aaman Sir, who was a Marxist, adopted the classic method of the KGB to extract secrets", "Don't worry, Appootta. Go and join the Marxist Party. It is a party of the exam-failed"* or "*As far as Ananthakrishnan is concerned, his past is a box that is carefully closed and sealed. It is not easy to prise it open. It may not be possible any more for him to clearly pronounce words like dialectical materialism, class war, petit- bourgeois and so on.*" (Throughout the novel, the portions from Kesavan's novel are printed in *italics* ; towards the end, the novel dissolves in Kesavan's own story, and gets printed in *roman.*) Only the dullest can miss the light vein in which the whole work has been conceived and the Party and its symbols and ideas have been treated. One can hardly compare it with, say, a work like *Snow* by Orhan Pamuk or the novels of Solzhenitsyn, Koestler, Silone, Marquez, Saramago or Llosa. Yes, Milan Kundera sometimes treats politics in the lighter vein, but at the heart of his novels is the terrible experience of totalitarian tyranny. There is no such bitterness in Mukundan, he can afford to view the politics of Kerala with detached humour like Kesavan does in the novel within this novel as the

Left has never had absolute power in the state.

The narrative provides plenty of opportunity for humour of every kind. While scratching his back, Kesavan wonders why there is no machine to scratch one's back while there are machines for grinding and washing and even measuring blood pressure. Kesavan develpos an intense dislike for walks after watching G. Aravindan's avant-garde film *Pokkuveyil* where the protagonist is given to endless walking. Looking at his neighbours Moosath and his wife Visalakshy, he feels the husband has stolen the wife's height just as Aravindan has stolen the walks of all others. After a shave, Samy's face 'is the colour of a sloughed snake'. All the barbers in Ananthakrishnan's place are communists so that the congressmen face their scissors in great fear. When a dog's owner says the dog's name is Appu, Ananthakrishnan tells him his son's name is Kaiser! When Aravindan, a young neighbour complains to Kesavan that he is jobless, Kesavan retorts, he is not an Employment Exchange and when he wants him to hear his woes, Kesavan says he is no Sai Baba! Describing Saravanan, the drunkard later killed by Appukkuttan in the novel, Kesavan says, "*His legs seem to have been fitted where his hands should have been and vice versa.He has begun to realize that the world is a place where everythong is functioning from the wrong places.*" When Appukkuttan is arrested, he sees a star metamorphosing into E.M.S. The leader walks down into his cell along a red ray from the star. In the lock-up, Appukkuttan falls forward into the white-haired, dark hands of E.M.S. In fact the tone of the whole novel indicates that it is no serious exposition or even a serious critique of the Left in Kerala, but a comedy of errors that could have been committed by Kesavan, Aaman master or Appukkuttan himself.

In spite of the levity of the whole narration, the novel does provide an insight into the creative mind—here that of Kesavan, the fiction writer. Kesavan refuses to share his unfinished novel even with his closest friends. He confronts Ravunni's warning, supported by a quote from Vaclav Havel, that he is treading perilous ground as he knows little of E.M.S. with a question whether he would issue him a *fatwa* like the one given to Salman Rushdie. He almost gives up writing it as it makes him sleepless especially when he has to deal with certain incidents like Sreedevi's death and the sexual maturing of Appukkuttan and he is deeply disturbed when Comrade Ravunni talks to the minister and gets him a membership in the Sahitya Akademi that he declines. His speech in the twenty-seventh chapter is an honest statement about the integrity of the writer. He refuses to be cowed down by threats from anonymous letter-writers who find fault with him for having written about a communist like E.M. Sankaran Namboodiripad instead of the ancient Sankara, the propounder of Advaita; still he respects those writers as their letters are like screams and says that his own writing is like a scream. He defends his indifference to public platforms and media and publicity in general. He claims his positions are to be found in his writing and he has no need to publicly demonstrate them. "If I die, no one must institute an award in my name. No one must unveil my portrait in the Akademi hall. I would like to remain without a name and address like an anonymous letter-writer." Here the author seems to express his own conception of a true writer that he would like to live up to.

Another interesting speech appears in chapter twenty-nine. It is delivered by Saravanan—a post-graduate who took to drinking—on his own behalf as well as on behalf of The Two Drunkards—Falstaff-like characters in the novel that they are—who declare that the congressmen and the communists are two sides of the same coin and both have only loved Power and never cared for genuine independence. The Congress has a great history of sacrifice and martyrdom, but the freedom won by the sacrifice of millions finally saw only the steering of their own Mercedes Benz cars in a few of the hands that had turned the charkha! The communists who had vowed to eradicate the farmers' hunger had ended up eradicating the farmers themselves! He also points out that Joseph Stalin had killed more human beings than Adolf Hitler had. After the speech the three drunkards move towards the poster of E.M.S. positioned in between glamorous film stars. This is when Appukkuttan murders Saravanan, proving once again that his concern is neither socialism nor the party, but solely the glory of E.M.S.

Ravunni's critical piece featured in *Keralam Weekly* that forms the Thirty-first chapter of the novel turns out to be a defence of the novel itself. The critic says that Kesavan is trying to problematize the political positions of the Malayalees, hiding behind the innocence and simplicity of the perspective of the boy, Appukkuttan. He points out that the text is multilayered and its ultimate meanings are progressive. This chapter can be read as a comment on the way the Left absorbs its criti-cism and turns it to its own advantage, as a satire on the critical jargon prevalent today in Kerala or as a ruse by the author himself to confuse his leftist readers. That he has been successful in the mission is best proved by K.N. Panikkar's preface itself that seems to take its cue from Ravunni's article declaring *Kesavan's Lamentations* to be 'multilayered' and struggling hard to prove it is a valorization of E.M.S and not, as it appears to a reader like me, a satire on blind hero-worship.

A.J. Thomas who has already proved his skill as a translator of fiction in his earlier translations of Paul Zacharia and Mukundan himself, has done an eminently readable and sensitive version of the Malayalam original. This is no easy task since this is a polyphonic text that follows different styles—of the public speech in Kerala, of contemporary critical discourse, of fictional narration both of the novel within the novel and the main narrative itself—while also invoking jargons and employing oxymorons and repartees to produce its refreshingly humorous effect.■

K. Satchidanandan a writer and critic is a former Secretary, Sahitya Akademi.

Traceries of Human Interactions

Susan Visvanathan

TALES ONCE TOLD: LEGENDS OF KERALA
By Abraham Eraly
Penguin, Delhi, 2006, pp. 200, Rs. 200.00

ONION CURRY AND THE NINE TIMES TABLE: THE SAMYUKTA ANTHOLOGY OF MALAYALAM STORIES
Edited by G.S Jayshree and Sreedevi K. Nair
Women Unlimited, an associate of Kali for Women, Delhi, 2006, pp. 119, Rs. 275.00

Abraham Eraly has selected and transcribed a collection of legends from Kottarathil Sankunni's *Aithihyamala* which is an eight volume work published between 1909 and 1934. The translation of the chosen stories is easy and lucid, with no embellishment. Eraly has the confidence of someone who understands the culture and the varieties of communities which integrate in the fabric or canvas of daily interaction. So, essentially, the stories are historical figures, and the legends woven around them. While it is difficult to date these stories, unless one is a Malayali conversant with dating techniques, the stories have a timeless quality about them.

In some sense, it is a work which revels in the innocence and the depravity that often go together. I always believe that people who say they have no interest in money or power are often interested in the use-value of things. By this primary commitment to consumption they remain composed about their inability to protect anyone's rights. A lot of the questions of human rights and identity are often interpenetrated by this ability to hide under the "conventions" called our culture. So, hopefully, the legal questions of what are democratic rights will inform the nature of modernity, while the stuff of legendary prowess may remain with us for purposes of entertainment, or for interpreting stereotypical representations, where we are forced to conform with tradition because it is the habit of our respective communities to expect this from us. When we passed the station called Tenali on our annual visits to Kerala, my father was always genuinely excited and pleased. "Tenali Raman!" he would say ... and then tell me about him. The story I found most interesting was about the king underpaying Tenali who then in revenge, reared a stallion with very little food (just enough to stay alive and healthy but behave neurotically) and he gifted this horse to the king. There is danger in that! Whether it is Tenali or Birbal in Akbar's court or Sakthan Thamburan in Kerala's legend, there is a sense of danger and laughter which accompanies them—a ruthlessness and a fearlessness. It is not surprising that the jester (sometimes he is the grave-digger) in Shakespeare is so significant as the site of wisdom; and a jester-king as Sakthan Thamburan has power beyond all others.

Eraly provides notes to help us, in the preface. They are not very intrusive, but in fact are charmingly part of the text. All the characters do and say notable things, so the yarn of history is located not just in caste, age and gender politics, but the hierarchies that are the staple of the readings themselves. It is problematic when he quotes to us stories which show the violence and ugliness of everyday life, and the competitiveness and malice, the horror and the demonology, yet the narrator redeems the readings which are too sexist with comments of his own. I think, sociologically, it would be problematic to read these in moral tones of rightness and wrongness, what we can do is read them for the sheer value of being presented with materials which were the stuff of popular lore—these are not "folktales", he is quick to tell us, but legends.

Today many of the questions of magic and religion in contemporary society have been foregrounded again in common and popular cultures. Do we believe the event of sorcery? Keralites, if they are not Mar Thomites (a denomination of Christians who are patently clear on the subject that if you believe in God, the devil can never touch you) are engrossed in the subject of traditional wisdom around sorcery and healing. Gilles Tarabout of the Maison des l'hommes, in Paris, has interesting work which shows that *shaitan (chattan) sewa* has cultic premises which are completely accessible in Ezhava communities, and when it comes to alcohol merchants wishing to foreground prosperity and ritual commitments, we as sociologists cannot get pious about who is a "*deva*". There is a tradition in yoga, also, which deals with appearances and disappearances, but the mystical tradition in specific non-dualist interpretations, say that that these powers must be ignored in order to stay on the path which leads to the ultimate light.

Magico-religious practices which run into the domain of healing are perhaps the most significant of the boundary crossings that are made apparent to us in such legends. Sociologically there is no diffidence in working with these materials, one must only tread the path between experience, subjectivity and objectivity as well or as bravely as we can. Eraly, as a writer working with texts which inscribe the oral narratives, wishes us to know that such a genre exists. As a diaspora Malayali with deep roots in Kerala which are kept alive by frequent returns, I must say that Kadamattath Kattanar has survived the tests of time and memory. It is good that Eraly has brought to light the large body of work which deals with the best known of these powerful figures. Kattanar (which means an orthodox priest) is a Christian sorcerer, and he is unusual because people say that "he learnt from the devil to cheat the devil". Eraly describes him as having lost his way in the forest and encountering an occult sect. This sounds more probable. Many cartoon strips revolve around the Kattanar and television has also contributed to serializing stories. Peasant cultures archivalize confrontations through such stories. They are really about status differences and oppositional forms of politics between communities and sometimes between men and women where power leads to a tangle of limbs in death or sexual consummation. There are never any winners in such games, only circumlocutions of the never-ending passionate feud. Yet as human beings, the expressive forms of these feuds continue, and the use of language, absence, fear, rhetoric and substitution are ways by which people are rendered obsolete or seem for the moment like winners, but the battles and the cycles of combat continue. Shishupal achieves, as Ravana does because he never forgets divinity, while hating. Memory is sufficient for this attainment, which is actually quite involuntary.



This brings me to the other collection of stories, a feminist collection, and need I say, "all are by daughters, all girls". Since the writers are all Malayali women, one sees a furore of activity, sometimes polite, sometimes furious. It is a little alarming to read story after story about rape, but since the statistics on rape of women is inordinately high in Kerala, as are the cases of suicide and of melancholia, we really cannot blame it on the rain.

What these writers do is clear out the specificities of the caste debate, and the differences and the problematics of symbiosis. They deal with the unmarked woman's body, which becomes the object of predatory attention. The pages spill out the rage and the sorrow. I shall not tell the content of these stories, because the task is to point out the validity of this cry, this lamentation, this quiet weeping. The rape of the psyche

becomes most significant when it is the story of a child desperately coping with a parent's absence. To conclude the possibilities, perhaps it is a feminist task to describe the occasional rape of men, by ambitious women. I am thinking specifically of the film, *The Blue Angel*, which is the epitome of such a rape, where Marlene Dietrich sings for the Nazi soldiers in a husky voice, and an infatuated intellectual gets trussed in the process.

Michael Crichton also brought our attention to the problem when he showed that when women have power they often behave like masculinists. In this collection Indu Menon frightens us with her story of the dangers of being always politically correct about alternative sexuality, when it too might define the predatory quality that defines rape.

There are no two ways of thinking about rape, and Sara Joseph plays with the idiom in the same brilliant and fearless way that she retold the Sita story many years ago. P. Vatsala meanders in poetic license to show us that when men have duties, they return to them, and the contexts of women's identity are shorn of their power to keep them. Manasi unwaveringly tells the haunting story of a dream time which would be labelled as insanity. O.V. Usha tells us that the past never really goes away, and that in our happiest moments, we are still incarcerated by memory. Gracy writes of the sheer exploitation of dependency, and the spectre of babies not born in cohabitation which demonize relationships. B. Chandrika writes an improbable story which has the power to persuade you it is true, 'not fiction', but the author refuses to corroborate the critic's allegation of its truth value. K.R. Mallika narrativizes the pride and significance of identity, where people hang on to their caste for dear life. K.R. Meera provides the terrifying space of old people's wisdom where their dentures rattle as they tell us horrible truths. Wisdom and beauty, what can they mean, when memory shreds?

A.S. Priya's *Onion Curry and the Nine Times Table* is hilarious, the only really funny story in the lot, which captures an existential sadness with the delicate tracery of un-slit veins. May children always save us from our fears and sadnessess, (this seems to be the intrinsic prayer in this story) and the children need not always be our own, as activists working with children have shown us. Githa Hiranyan discusses that unutterable moment when innocence, in spite of fair warning to those who can help goes unheard, and the victim is sucked into degradation. 'The Lesbian Cow' by Indu Menon is so stark, it could be a Dahl story. No political point here, just sheer fear. Sithara S. concludes with 'The Fire', which again horrifies by its twist of seeming innocence and yet the culpability and rapacity of the victim who seduces the rapists into endless and despondent bondage.

Are we the characters when we write, do we become them? That is a mystery which authors sometimes won't tell us about. It is a problem as old as The Idiot and as young as Lolita.■

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Muscles of Imagination and Fantasy

A.J. Thomas

THE WOMEN IN CAGES: COLLECTED STORIES
By Vilas Sarang
Penguin, New Delhi, pp. 283, Rs. 275.00

Vilas Sarang reminds me of O.V. Vijayan of Malayalam, although, unlike Vijayan, he is a poet, apart from being a fiction writer and critic who writes in Marathi and in English. Vijayan's stories of the modernist period were mostly allegories, parables, stories with a sort of cast-iron frame into which human situations or predicaments were set, as if following some kind of predestined design. The modernists are well-known for their philosophical predilections, notably confined to certain schools of the West. The influence of the French Existentialists and Latin American writers like Borges was manifest in the works of the modernists of several major Indian languages during the 1960s and 70s. Looking back, one remembers that the modernists rejected everyday realities of life and tried to grasp the symbolic and emotional essence of things. They attempted to give expression to this essence by employing images, archetypes and myths. These constituted the internal structure of the story. Organic development of the story is conspicuously absent in such works. Even in the scatological excesses of certain stories, Vilas Sarang uncannily resembles Vijayan. Whereas Vijayan grew out of this stage into writing his famous stories like 'After the Hanging', 'The Story the Wind Told' and others with a human touch, most of Vilas Sarang's stories in the present collection remain in such frames. These stories are seemingly devoid of empathy. It looks like a deliberate ploy employed by the writer to make the stories starker, to turn them into scalpels to perform surgery on the moribund body of society. However, it is to be noted here that the short story, generally, has moved from such cages of stiff form and staid content to vibrant, lyrical, narrative entities, after the grip of modernism loosened gradually, from the early 1980s, in most of the major regional literatures of India. The observation made by Dom Moraes that Vilas Sarang is 'one of the finest Indian writers of his time' acquires special significance in this context.

The stories in the present volume are those from his debut collection *Fair Tree of the Void* that came out in 1990 plus six hitherto uncollected stories, making up a total of twenty-six. They have been reworked and regrouped into five sections—'The City by the Sea', 'Libido Zones', 'Small Creatures', 'The Shadow of the Gulag' and 'Visions of Nirvana'. The author states that while a few of these stories were written in English, many of them were translated from Marathi, and worked upon by Breon Mitchell. He mentions this in detail in the 'The Making of the Text', which forms part of the 'Notes of a Working Writer' on page 277 of the book. If this is so, then the mention in the blurb that "*The Women in Cages* brings together all his short stories written in English ..." is inaccurate. Be that as it may, the fact that most of the stories carry no dates of first writing is a silent statement to the effect that they straddle at least three decades or more, as one of the stories, 'Rabbit' is found to have been included in the Penguin anthology, *New Writing in India* (1974). This could be the reason for the preponderance of stories written in the typically modernist mode.

Beginning with the very first two stories, which actually have the same characters and a common first-heading: 'Love in Mumbai-I' and 'Love in Mumbai II', and are separately titled 'An Evening at the Beach' and 'An Afternoon among the Rocks', Vilang Sarang demonstrates that his stories would be noted specially for their bizarre twists and turns. Bajrang, who has come to the beach with his girl-friend Shalini, on a cold winter evening, is chatting with her cuddling close, sitting at the bottom of the sea-facing side of the wall of a cemetery. He likes to sit against the cemetery wall because it reminds him of a passage from Albert Camus in which he speaks of 'Algerian boys and girls having assignations under the cemetery walls'. (Sure enough, there follows a Camusian description of an old man who has eased his bowels on the beach waiting for the waves to rise up to wash his bottom without his lowering it, failing in attempt after attempt, and getting drenched by a giant wave that finally came—quite disconnected from the main narrative.) Beyond the inland side of the wall, his friend Kanchan's mother is being cremated, unbeknown to him. Kanchan, who walks up from his mother's pyre towards the wall to urinate, sees Bajrang and Shalini on the other side, and invites Bajrang over to the cremation site as he desperately needs his company; Kanchan is feeling exceedingly alienated, with his father exultant at the death of his mother and the relatives hovering around like vultures. Bajrang, who has abandoned the warmth of his girl-friend's body, is now bent on making up for the loss by basking in the heat from the burning pyre. Kanchan's father acts scandalized at this, and Kanchan's relatives chase Bajrang to manhandle him. In the melee that ensues, the pyre tumbles down and Kanchan gets covered by the heaps of burning faggots from the pyre, and his mother's half-burned body rests on him. Bajrang jumps the wall opposite and runs, thinking about the etymological root of the word 'the great Indian Bustard' as deriving from the Latin *avid tarda* or 'slow-moving bird', and gloating over the fact that he is just the opposite of that. A rare

survivor of a vanishing species, indeed! He was duty-bound to protect his own life.

In the other story, Bajrang manages to take Shalini on to the rocks on the beach, another day. He is trying to be intimate with her. Initially she rebuffs him. But he quite innocently gets her on her back, pins her and suddenly proceeds further. She has to co-operate. In between, Bajrang can see a man in a blue shirt standing at a distance, eyeing them. Bajrang is erotically excited, as someone else is watching them; but to Shalini, he mouths some nonsense like a past-life connection with the man, who could be the detached *alter ego* of himself! Suddenly the blue shirt walks up and abducts Shalini at knife point. The reader jumps to the conclusion that the blue shirt is going to rape Shalini right in front of her lover. But no. A blue police vehicle had pulled up, quite a distance away. The blue shirt wanted Shalini merely to be a shield to ensure his safe passage. She will have to act as if she is his lover and make a show of walking away hand in hand, while Bajrang waited in the rocks. After he gets away, she is free to return, unharmed. The blue shirt and Shalini walk past the police, who don't even stop them. Instead, they swoop down to the rocks. They have information that a smuggler is lurking among the rocks. And Bajrang awaits the handcuffs....

I have taken some space to relate these two stories briefly, just to tell the reader that these are but the mildest in their bleakness, hopeless blind-alley situations and with seemingly whimsical and absurdist turns. They are even imbued with a strange sense of humour. Most of the other twenty-four are complex to the point of being labyrinthine, sinewy like a gangster's gleaming dark, muscular torso and are, all of them, heavily set.

The other stories in this first section are 'Musk Deer' (an existentialist story in which the protagonist, 'Musk Deer' fancies he has discovered his long-lost elder brother in the person of a street-side beggar; he carries around a deprived childhood in the form of a chronic pain in his navel; hence his nick-name) 'An Excursion' (in which a young girl plays death games, pretending to be a corpse, and then, assigning the duty of being a corpse to her doll, as witnessed by a person who got off the bus with an old woman at random and followed her into her house for no purpose at all but as a part of an aimless 'excursion' to kill his boredom), 'On the Stone Steps' (about a teacher who joins young boys in play running about in mud, slips and falls and breaks his arm; this dash of boyhood comes to him upon remembering an incident from his own boyhood, of pocketing a four-anna coin that fell off a beggar's bowl, how he picked it up and wanted to keep it for himself, then thought the better of it, and gave it to the beggar as if he was giving it from his bounty, and now the same incident repeating itself with a twenty-paise coin that fell off a beggar's bowl; on his way to return the coin, he played with the boys!) and 'The Revolt of the Gods', a surrealist story, with all the gods of a person's puja room walking away!.

In Section II, we have stories like 'The Missing Link' (a deeply disturbing story in which the parents of girl children are compelled to sell them off for prostitution as soon as they come of age, at the command of the village chief; this is in fact one of the best stories), 'Women in Cages' (about the life of women in the red light district, about twelve women in two groups of six who are exhibited in two shop-window-like cages facing the street), 'The Odour of Immortality' (again, a brothel-story, in which Champa, the Nepali sex-worker, develops vaginas all over her body, like what happened to Lord Indra, once), 'Om Phallus', (a Kafkaesque story in which a person's phallus grows to be his personality, like *Shiva linga* is Shiva himself; only that the erect, giant penis gets deflated and the cult around it suddenly comes to an end!) 'An Interview with Mr. Chakko' (a macabre story in which Chakko, the protagonist, has cut his wife into two, ostensibly because he is not used to a woman with a whole personality!) and 'Barrel and Mumbil: A Love Story', the last in the section.

Section III has five stories: 'Flies' (a story in 15 short, numbered sections, that describes a lonely person's observation and related activities centred around flies and spiders) 'Spider in the Clock' (about a man's obsession with a tiny spider inside a clock, how he takes down the clock, opens it, moves its hands etc.; again a curiously existentialist story) 'Rabbit' (an experiment in form, with a letter to the editor and news reports forming the body of the story) 'The End of History' (about a lonely man and his horrid games—the parrot who kept him company for many years dies as Sadananad, who came from far away to meet him and buck him up, accidentally causes its death, through the repetition of a phrase; enraged, the old man forces Sadanand to repeat a weird passage, looking at himself in the mirror, and Sadanand too dies, and the old man is filled with remorse) and 'Testimony of an Indian Vulture' (about a vulture approaching a doctor for treatment and the doctor spurning it, accusing it of eating rotten flesh; the cultured vulture out-argues the doctor and developing an inferiority complex, the doctor throws the vulture out!).

Vilas Sarang states in the first paragraph of the preface that "The section headings loosely point to the subject of the stories, and are not taken as 'defining' something. Needless to say, the stories—materializing several years apart in some cases—were not written to a plan. The grouping is only an afterthought." However, the very next paragraph is a virtual rebuttal of this very same assertion. It reads: "Perhaps a brief explanatory note regarding Section IV (The Shadow of the Gulag) is in order. The three stories at the head of this section were written as the result (along with my novel, *In the Land of Enki*) of my five-year stay in Iraq.... During the time I was in Iraq, the Emergency

of 1975 ran its course in India. On my annual vacation to India, I took in these developments. All stories in this section refract my Iraqi experience as well as that of the Emergency, and also my growing awareness of the realities of what has been called the Third World." A general observation made about the modernists, equipped with their Quixotean armour, shield and mount, is that they were not able to fully express their responses to the Emergency—an unheard of crisis that the 'free' citizens of the young Indian socialist-democratic nation-state faced. The philosophical questions raised mechanically became irrelevant as reactions to this momentous epoch. The stories written about this calamity in the form of fantasy or allegory, avoiding an encounter with real emotions, ended up in most cases as weak, fatalistic and futile as responses to grim contemporary realities. Instead of stories carrying the intensity of life-and-death situations, the ones that came out were compromises—mere fruits of middle-class mediocrity. The stories in Section IV have to be viewed partly against this background as well.

'The Return' is a hallucinatory experience of a student returning to India, where a junta is ruling after a successful military coup. Is he being interrogated and facing elimination, or is it all a dream he is experiencing on the flight to London? In 'Kalluri's Escapade', Kalluri, who has brought with him a machine with two cylinders that talks like the Sphinx, fascinates Jattu, the village innocent, no end; but soldiers descend on the scene, confiscate the machine which is supposed to be a radio-set 'made in China', and take Kalluri away, for allegedly treasonable activities, one presumes. 'The Terrorist' was written partly in the background of the Iraq of those days; 'A Tale of Two Generals' is reminiscent of O.V. Vijayan's *Saga of Dharmapuri*; 'The Tree of Death' is about a godman, a butcher in his *poorvashrama*, who got enlightenment as a result of a deep gash he received on his forehead which constantly ached. The Baba wishes to be immortalized and gets from the city a writer to do his biography and a painter who is painting his portraits. Getting bored, Martand, the writer, feeds bread crumbs soaked in whisky to the crows that are flitting about. A drunk crow nosedives and snatches away on its claws Bhadra, the painter's precious Parisian wig!

The last section has four stories, 'The Phonemate', 'Letters from Nikhil', 'The Life and Death of Manu' and 'The Departure'.

In 'The Making of the Text', Vilas Sarang elaborates on the process of his writing the stories. "Most of the stories in this volume were written in Marathi. Subsequently, they were redone in English. I say 'redone' because what I did cannot exactly be called translation. The final draft of each story was done without consulting the original, for, at that stage, my main concern was to see that the story worked in English. This was rendered easier because, when I write in Marathi, I often mentally translate sentences that were formed in my mind originally in English." One has to really appreciate the candour of the author in revealing this. Because, many of our well-known writers think in English and write in regional languages and it is the drab duty of the critic to point it out for better or for worse.

Conversely, the secret of the strength and stamina of major Indian fiction writers, the majority of whom would be simultaneously dealing with at least three languages, i.e. the particular regional language, English and Hindi, while writing in any of these, is revealed too. What can a British, American, French, German, Italian or Spanish writer, for example, accomplish in comparison? They would be mostly confined to their own single languages, whereas, for the average educated Indian—let alone writers—particularly in the cities and large towns, instantaneous translation among at least three languages is a matter of daily existence. Hence the originality and extraordinary range of bilingual writers like Arun Kolatkar, Dilip Chitre and others. O.V. Vijayan can also be considered a bilingual writer as he used English mainly for his accomplished writing of non-fiction prose; moreover, he himself translated most of his own fiction. Paul Zacharia is another case in point. Apart from being a competent translator of his own fiction, he is also writing fiction in English. The solid foundation of the mother-tongue is the strength of all these writers. Herein lies Vilas Sarang's relevance, too.■

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Alienation and Exile

Aruna Chakravarti

ROOPKATHAR MANUSH
By Sunil Gangopadhyay
Ananda Publishers, 2006, pp. 170, price not stated.

In the sixties Sunil Gangopadhyay, already a well-known poet, wrote his first two novels: *Jubak Jubati* and *Atma Prakash*, spearheading a movement that brought the Bengali novel out of the shadows of romance and cautious social comment to the glare of harsh introspection and relentless probing into the tensions of a post-Independence urban reality. Recording the uncertainties and tribulations of a 'lonely crowd' consequent upon the movement of people from one way of life to another, Sunil Gangopadhyay examines states of alienation and exile and analyses the methods that were being employed by the younger generation to overcome them—a generation that he projects as now rebellious, now beaten. The *jubak jubati* (young men, young women) of Sunil Gangopadhyay's Kolkata, driven by negative emotions unknown in their hitherto cloistered, conventional lives, flock the streets. Admittedly the Kolkata of the sixties provided ample material for the writing of ruthlessly realistic fiction. Sunil Gangopadhyay seized the opportunity. The novel, in his hands, became 'a slice of life'.

Structurally, these novels and the ones that follow proclaim a triumphant 'non-structure'. *Sukh Asukh, Aranyer Din Ratri, Hridaye Probas, Pratidwandi* and *Rupali Manabi* have often been labelled as 'narratives without a narrative'. Beginning at a random point, e.g. "Paritosh came this morning. 'What do you gentlemen think you're doing?' he said, "there's a limit to everything, '" (*Atma Prakash*) Sunil Gangopadhyay takes his readers through a series of characters and events that appear unrelated. The reality, however, is that the threads, held securely in the author's hand, move with simple but deft strokes towards the making of a superb fabric. There are no holes or faded patches in this fabric. No floundering. And despite the absence of the romantic and the heroic, of individuals of magnitude, there is no flagging of interest. The mesmerized reader goes through the motions of conversion of non-drama into drama; of the ordinary into the extraordinary.

After these early novels Sunil Gangopadhyay started enlarging his canvas. The next three decades saw the publication of four mega novels—*Eka Ebong Koyekjon, Sei Samai, Purba Paschim* and *Pratham Alo*—and Sunil Gangopadhyay's disengagement from a hitherto overwhelming present. Each of these novels is an enormous chess board over which hundreds of pawns are moved with skilled precision towards a seemingly unconceived conclusion. We find serious historical research here, anthropological study, social and religious enquiry and examination of values. There are vast galleries of character portraits, historical and fictional, inhabiting spaces not many writers would have the courage to explore leave alone expose. Sunil Gangopadhyay does it with the inimitable verve that characterizes his style—a quality that has enabled him to retain his position as the leading novelist of Bengal for four decades.

His latest offering—the novella under review here—is written in a totally different vein from all his previous work lending credence to the view that Sunil Gangopadhyay never ceases to surprise. *Roopkathar Manush* poses a number of questions. The first of them relates to form. Is it a fairy tale or a folk tale? An allegory or a piece of tribal lore dredged from ancient cultural memory? Is it a dream sequence or a flight of pure fantasy? Or could it be a combination of all these things?

The second question pertains to location. The story is set in a land—nameless and timeless—with no recognizable spatial dimensions. There are high mountains here cradling silvery streams and blue lakes dotted with lotus. The slopes are covered with dense jungles full of bears and tigers, snakes, hyenas, wolves and jackals. Strange trees grow in the jungle. From the jibil tree drips a clear sap which, when touched to the tongue, induces a series of dreams, each one sweeter than the last. There are real trees too. Date palms and tamarind.

The race that inhabits this land is strong and beautiful. The men are ruthless and warlike. Might for them is Right. The women are paragons of beauty with glistening gold skins and eyes like burning sapphires. Many of them have powers that are more than human. Yet they live as a disciplined tribe with laws that are adhered to scrupulously. There is a power hierarchy that is easily recognized. A raja or king holds supreme sway over a number of headmen or *goshthipatis*. Each *goshthipati* rules a village and his word is law.

Primitive societies, in which human behaviour is more consistently ritualized than in developed societies, valorize loyalty and deify the chief of the clan. Thus when seventeen-year-old Ruh is punished by the *goshthipati* for an offence committed by his brother the whole village is pitted against him. He is made to stand, day after day, under a blazing hot sky his hands strapped to two iron posts on either side. On a *machan* above his head is a pot of water with a hole in it. The steady drip of water on his head is calculated to drive him mad. But why such a terrible punishment for another's crime? The law of the land permits it. Blood feuds, persisting over generations, are not uncommon here. This case, however, is different. Ruh will not be killed. He will be kept alive as bait to ensnare his brother. Ruh makes a fortuitous escape into the forest where he finds the dying Raja Yuvaan. Yuvaan who was forced to leave his kingdom owing to a terrible disease which is killing him slowly but surely, places a strange proposition before the amazed Ruh.

Yuvaan's soul would enter Ruh's body and inhabit it for six months which is all the time left to him. The two souls would live in the same body just as mother and foetus do in pregnancy. With his superior experience and wisdom Yuvaan would guide Ruh out of the forest and lead him to fame and prosperity. In return Ruh would fulfil Yuvaan's last wishes. The first—to kill the invincible Raja Bhisham in battle; the second to taste the sap of the jibil tree. His third and greatest wish was to sleep with a woman he had seen only once but could never forget. She lived in a cave in the depths of the mountains and made marvellous etchings on the rocks around her. So great was her fame that many men came from far and wide to see her etchings. She was, Yuvaan said, so beautiful that her body seemed formed of light.

The perilous journey begins. Fantasy and universal truth are woven together in a surrealistic dream sequence. Yuvaan leads Ruh through the path of dreams to the three things he craved. They find Bhisham, the jibil tree and the etcher on the rocks—the beautiful Burusa. But who is Burusa? Is she the woman Yuvaan has desired all his life or is she Ruh's mother? Yuvaan is only a soul inhabiting Ruh's body. Will Ruh, then, be condemned to sleeping with his own mother? Will Ruh reach his final destination—the line where the sky meets the earth? Where fairy tale merges into pre-history?

Which brings us to the question: is Sunil Gangopadhyay, who has few equals in the realm of the realistic novel, now experimenting with another form—the visionary novel? Fatigued by the burden of social documentation, past and present, that he has carried for so long, is he now studiously evading the actual and escaping to a private world of guilt and fantasy? Admittedly, fatigue is crippling and disengagement with the real world saddening, making the transition from the dust bowl to the ivory tower a smooth and easy option.

Yet it is hard to say how much of Sunil Gangopadhyay's withdrawal is owing to an already historic impatience with realistic techniques and how much to the nature of reality itself. Rather than showing a simple evasion of seriousness I suggest that Sunil Gangopadhyay is now, like many others of his ilk, being thrust in upon himself and his own resources. In a world which cannot be changed and perhaps not even be understood, the great creative mind, wearied by irony and negativistic reporting, grasps at something really simple. Original and primieval. *Roopkathar Manush*, to me, does not suggest evasion. Rather it demonstrates a most effective form of responsibility. It cuts down and through to the truth as documentary realism cannot.■

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Locating the Home

Mahasweta Sengupta

THE WAY HOME: CONTEMPORARY BENGALI SHORT FICTION
Edited by Aruna Chakravarti
Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 282, Rs. 295.00

Readers of short fiction will be happy to welcome this new anthology. I enjoyed reading the stories as they are well selected and translated. Writers range from the end of the nineteenth (Rajsekhar Basu, 1880) to the middle of the nineteenth century (Suchitra Bhattacharya, 1950) and include some of the best-known artists of the Bangla language. Let me begin by quoting from the two writers I have just mentioned; Chakravarti translates Rajsekhar Basu's 'Anandibai' with utmost ease:

> Trikramdas Karorhi was a little over fifty with a marital career graph that was strange—to say the least. Like most other men he had had one wife, till only two years ago. She had died, suddenly, leaving him inconsolable and encumbered, besides, with the responsibility of half a dozen children. Unable to bear the burden of her loss, he had married Anandibai three months after the tragic event and then two others in rapid succession. He had, however, kept the fact of his last two marital ventures carefully hidden from friends, relatives and Anandi. (p. 3)

This language is easily "accessible" to the contemporary reader; in many ways, Rajsekhar Basu's appeal to his contemporary audience has been ably converted into the present world. This could also be looked upon as a sacrifice of the specificity of the story, the world that it portrayed and the characters that it embodied. One could launch into an academic discussion about the "value" of readability, but there is no doubt about the fact that to the contemporary reader, it is undoubtedly "accessible" as a text. Look
at this section from Suchitra Bhattacharya"s story 'Shikha's Address', and the point would be clear:

> Shikha took out a handkerchief from her vanity case and mopped her steaming face. She moved the shopping bag from her right hand to her left. It was a late afternoon in mid-April and very, very hot. The sun seemed to be raging and fuming out of a sky as white and clear as glass. Huddling in the faint streak of shade on the footpath she walked a few more steps. (p. 262)

The translation throughout the book is done for a very "contemporary" audience, and the language is absolutely current. The idea that each age has its own reading and its own translations comes out clearly in Aparna Chakravarti's rendering.

Actually, Rajsekhar Basu's 'Anandibai' is a good translation and holds the humour of the story quite efficiently. Bhibuti Bhushan Bandopadhyay's 'Aniseed Flower' is an excellent translation of a very famous story. I am not sure what 'aniseed' signifies to the western world,
it is a rather neglected and rarely used spice there whereas to us it brings to mind a host of flavours and connotations that are associated with 'mouri' or aniseed. The selection of writers is of course absolutely canonical, and you have the names of the major artists with the addition of two women at the end. Bani Basu and Suchitra Bhattacharya are my favourites too, and I am happy they are here. But surely there were women writers a little earlier, or are we supposed to read the dominant canon only?

I should admit here that, in spite of the good translation work of Aruna Chakravarti, I felt deeply disturbed by several matters that the publisher has done in this case. The cover is a beautiful picture of a makeshift temple of the goddess Kali with hibiscus strewn over the black face of the deity, a little village boy sitting next to this deity. The name of the book *The Way Home*—is taken from the name of a translated story of Sirshendu Mukhopadhyay in the collection. What is this book about? On the top of the cover page is printed: "Contemporary Bengali Short Fiction", and at the bottom, "Edited by Aruna Chakravarti".

I am unable to find any reason as to why Aruna Chakravarti would "edit" what she has chosen to translate.

Penguin actually seems to erase the role of the translator; she is hidden behind the "editor's" façade, she never claims any identity for the person who is actually rendering the Bengali texts into English. In fact, you would not have known that she has translated these stories if you did not read the "Introduction" or the small print at the back of the book. The Introduction is all about Chakravarti's experiences and understanding about the act of "translation" and she makes

The translation throughout the book is done for a very "contemporary" audience, and the language is absolutely current. The idea that each age has its own reading and its own translations comes out clearly in Aparna Chakravarti's rendering.

claims that sound very odd in a book where she is an 'editor' at the most! The assumptions that underlie this Introduction are dated, the notion of our cultures being "provincial" and English being "powerful" and "international" proceed from a very subservient attitude towards the global dominance of a hegemonic language. The Introduction appears to be pleading for the consideration of "local" or "regional" cultures by the "international" and the "powerful" of the world. This is disturbing; I thought that we had outgrown our intention to serve our goods to the English-speaking world just because we want them to consider our existence on this part of the planet; I thought that our identity did not depend on the acknowledgement of the so-called international or the cosmopolitan. Aruna Chakravarti says as a translator she "cherishes a dream of finding an ideal language—a common language that all mankind can share." Is that why we are so keen on translating our literatures into English? How can "mankind" share one language when cultures are existent on the very uniqueness of languages? A larger question is, who is her audience for this anthology of short fiction for an understanding of what "translation" aspires to do?

Interestingly, this is the only place where it becomes clear that she is not only doing the translations of the texts, but also choosing what she translates. Is this essay for scholars in the area of translation studies? Then surely it has to refer to a host of research that discusses these issues in the discipline. It should have been a "Translator's Introduction" where she talks about her own experiences and not a pronouncement on the area.

Penguin has some responsibility as a publisher in India; they have to acknowledge the translator and the existence of the "original" as primary agents in the process of translation from Bengali into English.■

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That Sacred Entity—'Word'

Anup Beniwal

SHABDON KE AALOK MEIN
By Krishna Sobti
Rajkamal Prakashan, New Delhi, 2005,
pp. 435, Rs. 550.00

Krishna Sobti's *Shabdon Ke Aalok Mein* is a book of miscellany that evolves as a continuous narrative of her ever-evolving personality—both as a writer and as an individual. Woven around memory and nostalgia, travel fragments and everyday associations, dialogic-monologues and interviews, creative-critical reflections/impressions and academic interactions, this narrative tends to foreground Sobti the woman, her milieu and some of the literary moments she has lived through in the near past. As such, it not only becomes a socio-literary index of her oeuvre—and one tends to approach the book with the same expectation, i.e. to discover a key to Sobti's literary corpus—but also an introspective chronicle of her life and times.

In its meshing of the content and the form, this narrative is vintage Sobti. Its linguistic density and stylistic dexterity admirably captures the complex burden of her memory and brings to the fore the nuances of her thought processes. For Sobti, 'word' is a sacred entity and when employed with care and reverence it has the power to fuse the inner and the outer, the self and the surroundings, nature and culture, the said and the unsaid, the seen and the unseen into a communicative and cognitive whole. Literature is an eternal process of mastering and organizing the word in a way that not only captures 'life' to create a cumulative 'text' of socio-human significance, but also, via this text, creates a dynamic dialogue between the past and the future, then and now, *desi* and *marga*, author and reader, time and space to reveal the 'truth of life.'

Krishna Sobti's literary ethos comes out as a unique blend of authorial integrity and independence and she guards it fiercely. She steers clear of the art-for-art and art-for-life binary and all politico-literary sloganeering or superficial 'isms'. The form and content are significant not in their autonomy but in the way they are bound together by the authenticity of the idiom and the honesty of the associative sensibility of the author. It is the combined expression of the inner churning of the mind/consciousness and the external reality. Rather than looking at truth/life, the 'word' in her becomes a medium to look into truth/life. A deep empathy for her characters and their locations, an organic evolution of their life trajectories, the socio-psychological configuration of human relationships—all these get distilled through a process of dense reflection and commensurate expression: "Meditation is the soul of literature and language is its body." The ordinariness of everyday life, with all its contradictions, is thus rendered extraordinary by the strict discipline of the 'word culture' that engulfs Sobti within and without.

It is via her problematization of expression and language, and objectivity in writing that one gets to the core of her literary praxis. That which on the face of it seems to be contradictory, on deeper reflection emerges as nuanced and inclusive enunciations on creation, creativity and life. Sobti illustrates through inclusions, through associations and through complexity of awareness. It is this aspect of her reflective ethos that makes her writing tantalizingly nuanced and rich experience.

Sobti's associative sensibility as a writer is further supplemented by a deep sensitivity to/of her expressive idiom, i.e., Hindi. It is her romance with this language that imparts individuality and depth to her works and gives them an authentic touch. Hers is not a "superficial relationship with language and words" as she is "forever absorbing the kinship of words, the stability of words, the meanings that echo in words . . . A writer showers with equal love the costume, the body and soul of words."

The very ambience of *Shadon Ke Aalok Mein* is imbued with a distinct reflective-meditative aura. While it is the sylvan sojourn of Summer Hill in Shimla that provides the trigger for her reflections, it is her address to Sarvar that helps her give form to her experiential-intellectual meanderings and provides this book with its structure. Sarvar thus becomes a narrative-reflective catalyst so essential to Sobti's ever-spiralling literary credo. As an extension of Hashmat (a virtual-self of Sobti in *Hum Hashmat)* Sarvar enables the author to dig deep inside and confront herself, and as a distinct other, she helps the author in Sobti to understand the world outside, both for herself and for the audience/reader. And in the process Sobti is able to strike a narrative/communicative balance wherein creation and creativity run parallel to the creator, and springs from the common ground between the two. The anxiety to create and communicate meaning through 'the aura of words' is further supplemented by the way each 'section' of the book is organized. The central reflective piece of each section is sought to be illustrated through concrete reminiscences, random interviews, literary citations and an evocative address to Sarvar or the prospective reader. Such a narrative mesh creates an aura of perspectival commonality-in-plurality spanning time and space and makes this text a composite and cumulative statement of word-culture that, transcending national and linguistic boundaries through an avowal of converging literary sensibilities in divergent locations, builds up the possibilities for a world-culture. Within this cultural corpus Polish poetry jostles with Katyayani's poetic protests and both with Nazir's *nazm* to complete a reminiscental point of view; Liladhar Jagudi's poetry caps Sobti's literary agenda for Indian writers; and an Argentinian and Portugese poetic sensibility enhances one's appreciation of the Himalayas.

Shabdon Ke Aalok Mein contains four interviews that form an important constituent of its narrative. Though each one of these is marked by a distinct thematic emphasis and personal preferences of the interviewer, yet, when read together, these, apart from recapitulating the salient aspects of Sobti's literary vision, not only lays bare her anxieties as a writer in times of intellectual and emotional violence—the Partition politics and its aftermath *then* and the 'commodifying' onslaught of communal politics and globalization *now*—but also provides one with a blueprint to survive such crises. Sobti distinguishes between 'ideology' and 'culture of ideas' and posits the latter as the domain of literature. It is this word-culture, this propensity to understand life in its inclusiveness that helped her transcend and negotiate the trauma of the immediate and strike an affirmative equilibrium between memory and forgetting, the felt and the thought despite the immediacy of the event, i.e. Partition. Unlike politics, history or religion, literature is the domain of the undivided and indivisible, an indestructible repository of human faith and values. Though fully aware of the political, it is not a purveyor of politics. As such, Sobti is pained by the political division of Literature into literatures—woman literature, dalit literature, etc. Despite all their empowering and interventionist potentials, such divisions tend to undermine the wholeness of the word/world and transforms 'literariness' into a designer product up for grabs in this mass and market mediated political economy.

Sobti's meditations on the evolution of India as a nation-state, its literary, cultural and intellectual capital, environment and nature—yet another remarkable aspect of this miscellany — spring from and unfold within the conceptual framework of her sophisticated 'word-culture.' A strong autobiographical streak marks all her literary and non-literary meditations and imparts the narrative of *Shabdon Ke Aalok Mein* with a confessional aura. This results in an immediate bonding of the reader with the writer.

Though the book contains much with which the Sobti initiate is already familiar—for example some of the interviews and 'literary-statements' compiled in this book have already appeared elsewhere—yet for Sobti aficcionados it provides another opportunity to 'interact' with the various facets of her personality within a single cover in Hindi. A peep into her childhood, her everyday life routine and her emotional-intellectual associations with literary and academic personalities like Trilochan, Bhishm Sahani and Jaidev come as an added bonus. And the photographs appended at the end of this book strongly ground the whole narrative in the real/lived.■

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Encountering Premchand in Translations

Pushpesh Pant

KARMABHUMI
By Premchand. Translated from the Hindi
by Lalit Srivastava
Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2006, pp. 358, Rs. 395.00

MY LIFE AND TIMES: PREMCHAND
By Madan Gopal
Roli Books, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 230, Rs. 295.00

Premchand has an iconic status in Indian literature that is almost unmatched. Only the Nobel Laureate Rabindra Nath Tagore is held in comparable esteem. Premchand, it may be argued with some justification, has always been more accessible to the general reader than Guru Dev, first, because fiction and narrative prose has more takers then mystical poetry and secondly because Premchand was a writer who believed in actively participating in the struggles waged by his fellow beings. His commitment to the socialist ideology and abiding involvement with the freedom struggle have also contributed to his enduring popularity. Just one more thing may be added. The language Premchand wrote in was Hindustani —not *shuddh* Sanskritized Hindi or the refined Urdu used in the court circles. Many credit him with forging an idiom that reflected with great fidelity the synthesizing sprit of the Indian people—residing in the Hindi heartland. His novels and stories deal with the lives of ordinary villagers or those belonging to the segment of populations that is best described as the wretched of the earth—the so-called untouchables and the abjectly poor-exploited women and the like. Style and substance blend beautifully in the works of Premchand and it is not surprising that seven decades after his death he still draws the attention of translators and critics.

Premchand has been translated in all the major languages in the world and some minor ones too. At one time translating him into Russian was a flourishing cottage industry and the reputation (well deserved) of German translator Dr. Lothar Luthze is largely based on his exertions with Premchand. There has been no dearth of English translations either. Madan Gopal was a pioneer and many worthies have followed him. One of Premchand's novels has been translated by his gifted grandson Alok Rai, a professor of English and some of his stories are now available in translation done by his award-wining translator granddaughter Sara Rai. Besides translations in print numerous Indians and foreigners have encountered the great writer in cinematic 'translations'. Satyajit Ray has rendered into celluloid Kaphan (Sadgati) and Shatranj ke Khilari, Godan and Do Bailon ki Kahani (Heera Moti) have also spawned memorable films. Hundreds of thousands of schoolchildren have been exposed to Premchand as prescribed text.

However, the classic Godan has cast such a long shadow that other perhaps equally interesting, novels written by Premchand have suffered some neglect. It is in this context that the translation of *Karmabhumi* assumes significance. The former Nepalese Prime Minister B.P. Koirala mentions *Karmabhumi* in his autobiography *Atmabritant* and the powerful impact this novel had on him when he first read it: he recounts how tears streamed down his cheeks as he turned the pages of the book and was griped by the power of the words penned by Premchand although he was aware that some critics had charged that *Karmabhumi* was not an entirely original work but was inspired by *Vanity Fair*.

Karmabhumi published in 1932 holds a distant but disturbingly clear mirror to our times. The action is set in the era of nonviolent Gandhian struggles against colonial rule and striving for social reform. As we busy ourselves with ritualistic celebrations the centenary of Satyagraha re-reading this novel is a particularly thought-provoking experience. It is difficult to judge the quality of translation in this cast of mind. This reviewer was prompted to read *Karmabhumi* in Hindi to "relive" the feelings this work had triggered years ago in adolescence. It is difficult if not impossible to sustain the inspirational idealism that permeates these pages. Even in original Hindi, the language used seems far removed from the living (or dead!) Hindi in India in the 21st century. Most young readers whose mother tongue is Hindi would require a friendly translator's help to understand a turn of phrase, more than odd word and usage that is lost with the milieu. The translation under review is obviously targeted at foreign audience as the introduction indicates. What is a little jarring is that the word Hindu prefixed before society and culture is taken as a synonym for Indian.

The translator is introduced as an emeritus professor of biological science and this seems to be a labour of love—*swantah sukhay*—in the years of his retirement. Lalit Shrivastav is quite conscious of the hazardous minefield he stepping out into. The translator's note candidly admits that a literal translation is often baffling and sometimes unintelligible and has to be converted to everyday English, which involves more or less free colloquial translation. The problem is that there is no agreement regarding 'everyday English' or what is contemporary colloquial. There also remains the problem of interpreting—much more than translating—terms like Karma and Dharma.

Switching from the Hindi original to the present translation one was not left with any feeling of discomfort or the least bit of annoyance. As far as we are concerned—speaking for the common reader—the translator has successfully coped with a difficult challenge. The spit of the original, the mood of the narrative and the identities of the characters come across without much distortion. The professional pedants may quibble over finer points of theories of translation but that does not concern us. The vast majority of readers who cannot read the original work in Hindi will be grateful for a readable translation.

My Life and Times, an autobiographical narrative is a fascinating recreation from the works of Premchand by Madan Gopal. Madan Gopal, acknowledged as the translator responsible for introducing Premchand to the English speaking readers has been scrupulously honest in separating his own translation from those written by Premchand originally in English marking these in italics. The result is indeed a unique biography of one of the greatest storytellers of all time. Together with *Kalam ka Sipahi* written by Premchand's son Amrit Rai (now available in a brilliant translation by Harish Trivedi) this provides an engrossing and comprehensive introduction to the great writer. Besides providing interesting and insightful glimpses of Premchand's life this slim volume sheds illuminating sidelight on the waxing and waning of the Indian national struggle. It also nostalgically evokes the atmospheres of the small town, the countryside as well as cities like Allahabad and Benaras in the 1920's and 1930's. The short sojourn in the film city of Bombay is also included. The context of many of the texts are now accessible to the readers.

As Alok Rai writes with a touch of irony in his introduction to *Premchand His Life and Times*, "In many respects, Munshi Premchand has become a hoary icon, a sometime sentimentalist from a bygone age, firmly established in the dubious immortality of a curricular classic. He has become part of our cultural shorthand, the familiar and rubbed-down currency of our social imagination. Embalmed in textbooks, routinely rehearsed in classroom and examination hall, Premchand is obviously dead—rendered innocuous by being made part of the deadening and hypocritical tedium of the education system." Hopefully *My Life and Times* will change this mindset a bit. Refreshingly different, it does not presume any prior acquaintance with Premchand's writings. It is a wonderful stand alone treat and eloquent testimony to the indispensability of translation.

To conclude, we feel that translation is the name of a game that each generation plays not quite the same. From Nabokovian pristine discipline insisting on remaining faithful not only to this sprit but also the letter to more than poetic licence taken by the trans-creationist there stretches out an unlimited expanse of territory to be tilled fruitfully or futilely by translators—good, bad or ugly. Each to his own.■

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Challenging Everyday Realities

Akshaya Kumar

ANUGOONJ: A COLLECTION OF HINDI SHORT STORIES
By Geetanjali Shree
Rajkamal Prakashan, Delhi, 2006, pp.136, Rs. 150.00

As the Hindi short story spills beyond its patriarchal enclosures, rebellious fervour gives way to a self-reflexive and intellectually calibrated mode of storytelling. There are no easy passionate outbursts or relentless bouts of ideological sloganeering. The young breed of woman Hindi writers, particularly of the 90s, sustain the credo of protest set into motion by an earlier generation of writers, through a critical resurrection of the issues that were once thought to have been sufficiently clinched in favour of the woman. Old denouements inspire new dialogic take-offs.

Much before her well-acclaimed novel *Mai*, Geetanjali Shree had launched her creative enterprise with a collection of stories entitled *Anugoonj* (1991) that echoed the predicaments of 'the new woman' imagined by earlier writers. The echo is not just a romantic reverberation of the original salvo; it is the counter-sound too. Shree's acoustics register those little noises, dissonances and discords that puncture, if not totally disrupt, any given mode of survival—including that of protest.

The woman-centric tales configure the ironies of the so-called 'free' space that 'the new woman' had rather violently reclaimed from the clutches of patriarchy long ago. The stories in this sense are stories of post-protest as the situations are far too complex and double-edged to be approached in terms of mere rhetoric. In the very first story of the collection, 'Private Life', the unmarried educated woman breaks free from the family fold to live in rented accommodation independently. Instead of negotiating the space for private life, the woman protagonist chooses to lead a bohemian life—marked by "cigarette . . . beer . . . white man" (p. 12), inviting strong reactions from patriarchal relatives and neighbours. The story does not answer questions; rather it raises some—should a private life border on the licentious? Also, an equally pertinent counter-question—would patriarchy ever concede intelligent adulthood to woman?

Each story records a mini-tale of struggle beyond the allegorical binaries of defeat or victory. Very eloquently, in her story 'Bel-patra' ('Leaf of the Wood-Apple Tree'), a female character Fatima sets the tone of Shree's creative dynamics thus: "This I have understood that small battles are real. Big battles are easy. We fight them with pride and die for them with a sense of pride. But these small battles . . . cling on to us like termites – as disgusting as insects . . . they just eat us from within. These battles are so small that it becomes difficult to see their relationship with big honourable prestigious battles"(p. 28). There is little scope for any melodrama or heroics in small struggles, as protagonists undergo mutations from within. In the story, when everything right from cow-dung to horse-excreta is communalized beyond recovery, forging even a working secular marital life proves to be a greater challenge than marrying across religions.

Shree's stories pertain largely to the politics of interior landscape—a space hitherto assigned to the women by the 'outgoing' patriarchy. It is through the poetics of space that the storywriter exposes gender-based hierarchies in relationships that otherwise pose to be quite sympathetic and accommodating. In 'Tinke' ('Straws'), Hemant, a busy husband, proposes to fix an additional bulb in the 'kitchen' for the comfort of his wife Chanda, but when it comes to extra lighting in the 'sitting room', he hardly bothers to consult her. The secure domestic space suddenly appears vulnerable as Shree's woman characters threaten to transgress the gendered zones.

The space of the woman lapses into a closed orbit in the title-tale 'Anugoonj' ('Echo') as well. The much-cherished security of the household fails to enamour Muniya, the educated housewife as she watches intently the royal battle outside between the rain and the sun: "Who will win today? Sun or rain?"(p. 130). A constant play between the two, in all its permutations and combinations, provides a dynamic foreground to the otherwise deceptively passive inner situations in Shree's short fiction. In another story 'Peela Sooraj' ('Yellow Sun'), dark clouds suddenly overtake the woman protagonist, their dreadful thunder mirroring her inner turbulence. The story ends with a question: "After this tempestuous rain would a big yellow sun rise?" (p. 40). In 'Darar' ('The Crack'), the roof leaking drop by drop becomes a metaphor for Kalpesh's progressively degenerating life till he takes shelter under the tin-roof of his servant's quarter.

More than simple feminism, what really informs Shree's stories are its pangs and confusions, its quarrels with itself. 'Kasak' ('Pangs') unfolds the tension between the two approaches to life—one is that of intellectual aggression and the other of natural spontaneity. The two friends in the story are external projections of the same divided self. One part is politically hyper-conscious; the other is equally indifferent. One part reads the politics of power in every human action; the other tends to lead life by sheer instinct. One dreads the vastness of the sea; the other simply takes its waves in its strides. Yet both, despite their inner anxieties and fears, seek to combine in moments of challenge. And this togetherness of different approaches engenders open-endedness in Shree's fictional forays.

Shree's stories are interludes of sophisticated metropolitan life. The characters walk in and out of relationships without the usual claptrap or thunder of morality; only echoes travel through the space. In 'Hashiye Par' ('On the Margin'), the divorced woman protagonist's seasonal intimacy with married Rajat is never raised to the level of any solemn relationship. Both are aware of the transience of their encounter. Also her break-up with her husband Naresh is never sensationalized; both come to the realization that there "is no point in flogging a dead horse" (p. 116). There is no full-throttled anger, but only disenchantment. In 'Safed Gudhal' ('White Hibiscus') as well as 'Anugoonj' ('Echo'), there is sufficient disillusionment between the life-partners, but the violence of divorce is deliberately postponed.

In some stories however, the echoes become too audible; what should have been left out at the level of suggestion is brought forth explicitly. In 'Doosra' ('The Other'), for instance, Shree does not leave situations unexplained; she tends to verbalize the inner complexes of both Bhagirath and Neelam. Also in 'Tinke', the binaries between Chanda and Didi and then between Kisshu and Shanu are bland and predictable. The story 'Peela Sooraj' is all noise. At times when characters break into English expressions, which by now have become part of metropolitan lingo, they sound too obvious and even loud. Bold and big expressions such as "post facto rationalization", "we are a bastard lot", "you are a phenomenon in the bed" work against Shree's poetics of echo.

Shree's singular focus is on the dilemmas of the modern educated woman, which in terms of range may not be very spectacular, but in terms of their intensity and authenticity, extremely enriching. It is time that the Hindi short story stepped out of its traditional constituency of rural India to negotiate with the emerging metro-sensibi-lities—something it has been wary of, for political reasons. Shree's stories bridge the gap between Hindi and Indian English fiction as her highly educated characters come to terms with the issues of existence, displacement and the politics of relationships—issues which have hitherto been taken up almost exclusively by 'elite' Indian English writings.■

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Negotiating the Rough Edges of Life

Rekha

KHURDURI HATHELIYAN (A COLLECTION OF POEMS IN HINDI)
By Anamika
Radhakrishan Prakashan, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 183, Rs. 195.00

In an era dominated by prose and the prosaic, poetry is a saving grace. This is especially so, when—trudging through the turbulence of times—it is able to 'sponge-in' the world into words, soak them with the possibilities and probabilities of humane existence without being superficial, hysterical or partisan about it. This cognitive-aesthetic soaking in of life into words through poetry is, however, a hugely demanding and humbling task. Forever caught between the lure of spontaneous overflow and a need for disciplining of emotions and intellect; reactive egoism and a self-effacing inclusive activism; a profusion of clichéd slogans and discourses and an emphathetic and organic chiselling of words, the poetic grace—a sum total of its aesthetics, ethics and thematic—at one level hinges on the quality of this balance. At another level it also depends on the capacity of the writer to confront and survive the profusion of digital/virtual bytes and retrieve and reinvest the written word with cognitive and communicative values that empower not only classes but also the masses along with the written word. Anamika's collection of Hindi poems, *Khurduri Hatheliyan* is marked by the impress, anxieties and inheritance of this contemporary poetic inheritance and responsibility.

An academician, critic and a writer Anamika's is a familiar name within the contemporary literary circles in Hindi. Her works not only evoke critical curiosity but also help one gauge the state and direction of contemporary Hindi poetry (by women). While reading her poems, two things become obvious: one, contemporary Indian Writing, being an unconscious reiteration of typical urban middle class sensibility, is still largely by and for the consumption of this class; two, when an academic-critic turns to creation, it only ends up becoming a very self-conscious amalgam of creativity, critique and conditioning, all rolled into one. Anamika's poetry is no exception. Mixing the felt with the thought, she creates a poetic world and uses it as a mirror to unravel and critique the ironies and angularities of the self and the society and as a pliant medium of/for aesthetic conditioning. Despite her avowed poetic commitment—made clear in her dedication—her best poetry, at times, remains grooved in its typical middle class urban sensibility. It is a sensibility that is at its poetic best while delineating the abstract in human relationships and unravelling the self through sensuous and psychological encounter with the social in which it is situated. Instead of empathizing with the concrete world across—the downtrodden, the rustic, the communal other—it either ends up patronizing them or uses them as representational props to organize and elicit 'poetic' emotions. However, the conscious and the committed in Anamika, stimulated as it is by contemporary issues and discourses, tries hard to redeem her poetry from the unconscious pulls of her situatedness both at the level of thought and language. It is her belief in writing as an act of deliberate human commitment that enables her to transcend the class, caste and communal schisms and privilege elemental human bonding.

Khurduri Hatheliyan is a collection of seventy-seven poems split into six subsections – 'Antehpuram', 'Dudhkattu', 'Kuchh Attpatti Prem Kavitaein', 'Azadi', 'Musalman Kya Hote Hain, Amma' and 'Tos Bharos'. Perhaps written sporadically over the years, the poems deal with patriarchy and gender issues, seem to align with a feminist ethos, touch upon the communal problem etc., but the main concern that runs through and binds these poems is the question of human faith, connectedness and humane bonding. Poetry equips her with the wherewithal to know and to connect ('Jaanana', pp. 84-85).

Instead of finding these connections within the clichéd relational matrix/idiom, she discovers it in unexpected yet familiar situations and interactions. The strength of her poetry lies in the rediscovery of these recuperative emotional and linguistic connections and transmuting them into a statement of hope in times of stress:

> It is that foolish story
> Where Horse made friends with grass
> Caressed and left it intact
> Like the eyes of a she deer
> Caressed with its hoof
> By a deer:
> With bated breath, watchful, slowly.
> ('Ek Paglet Katha', pp. 57-58)

Within Anamika's democratic poetic sensibility, faith and love being interchangeable entities, complement and define each other. As such she constantly tries to enrich and enlarge the concept of love through a continuous experimentation and improvization of her imagery. Love for her is neither a spiritual yearning nor a romantic sensuality that exists between man and woman but a sensuously tangible feeling that goes beyond the conventionally delimiting spatial enclosures—that of the body, class or culture—to enter the realm of the democratic and the human. She forsakes conventional notions of love for newer substitutes/alternative human chemistry. This love may reveal itself in such mundane acts as that of riding a rickshaw ('Bharosa', pp. 140-41) or while travelling in a crowded bus ('Bus Ticket', p. 83).

Both the palpable and the abstract in human bonding can only be understood by problematizing the abstract and palpable in human emotions/relationships. It is therefore not surprising that many of Anamika's poems are preoccupied with the problem of redefining/putting into words the inarticulate-yet-sensuous in human experience/feelings so as to put into perspective their enchanting unfamiliarity. In the very process she transforms and expands the whole cognitive and relational experience:

> Some deceits are stark white
> Recently born lamb kid–
> Violet, warm, soft, li'l one!
>
> Some deceits are pale yellow petals
> Of a bouquet
> You received in Hospital
> They laugh the laughter of a helpless father!
> When the child insists for a moon-toy
> The mother says, "O.K. I'll get it tomorrow, son,
> Now go to sleep."
>
> Is it a deception? ('Dhokha', p. 162)

The need for connectedness and trust, the insistence on widening the horizons of human experience and understanding that Anamika foregrounds as strategies of survival along with the inquisitive restlessness that informs, and in fact becomes a continual refrain in her poetry, spring from a poetic world view that is poignantly aware of the omnipresence of violence at the core of human existence. It is the interplay between the two—violence and hope – that enables her to understand and interrogate the ironies of life with a degree of success and communicate its complexities to her readers effectively and affirmatively:

> Offerings are an old cradle –
> That sparrow knows
> Three feet above the snake hole
> Hangs whose
> Little nest
> ('Dange aur Karamkand', p.123)

However, as soon as Anamika-the-poet is substituted by Anamika-the-activist or Anamika-the-academician this delicate poetic balance deserts her. Its place is either taken by discursive acrobatics or activist simplification. Most of her gender-poems—despite their deconstructive potential—fall prey to this propensity of hers. No doubt these poems bring out the passivity, pain and loneliness of women within a violent patriarchal dispensation and suggest a blueprint for female bonding/empowerment, yet the analytic prism that Anamika deploys for the analysis of man-

woman relationships is dated. It is still premised on the male-female binary, and hence fails to problematize its dynamics holistically. The 'Antehpuram' poems simmer with unveiled anger and polemical potential, but they hardly add anything new to the gender-perspective.

Poems like 'Angrezi Yun Bhejti Hai Bambarshak Viman' (pp. 113-115) or 'Patta Patta, Buta, Buta' (pp.127-129) bring out the postcolonial and communal aspects of violence respectively. But, like her gender-poems, they read more as 'thesis-poems.' It is only in those poems where she underplays 'the thought' (i.e. her academic-activist-discursive pressures) and remains true to 'the felt' (i.e. the lived, the shared) that Anamika holds her own as a poet. The moment this priority/balance is disturbed, her art turns into mere craft.

The last two poems of this collection, i.e., 'Jinke Liye Likhi Jaati Hein Kavitaein' and 'Kinke Liye Likhi Jaati Hein Kavitaein', betray Anamika's anxiety about her art and its relevance, and in fact put this whole collection in perspective. How does Anamika bring them —her target audience—within the ambit of her poetic world? How do they, who might intuitively share and live the poetry and its potentialities but may not share its 'language', enter the realm of the poetic? As stated earlier, the possibility inheres in the author's deep sense of democratic commitment—both at the level of thought and language. While at the level of thought she strives hard to expand the conventional, at the level of language she consciously tries to forge an expressive idiom that admirably supplements her democratic ethos. It is an idiom where the colloquial jostles with the pure, the classic with the folk, the popular with the academic, the domestic with the public, and when both fail she coins a vocabulary of her own to carry the burden of an emotion or a thought. And in the process she, casting away her elitist insulations, not only widens the experiential horizons of her poetry but also makes it amenable to a diverse audience.

Despite the onerous creative burden that poetry bears and in turn puts on the prospective writer in times like ours, it is really wonderful to see this subterranean literary lifeline survive the onslaught of the market and mass-mediated discursive noises. Anamika's poetry, in its brush with the concrete and abstract in life and in its attendant probe of human relationships, human yearnings and aspirations, tries hard to creatively imbibe these 'contemporary noises' and—despite the amorphousness of her themes and unevenness of her 'craft'—is, at times, able to transform them into a revealing aesthetic experience. It is precisely these redeeming moments that reveal her poetic potential and underline her/Hindi's poetic future.■

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Three Translations

Sajni Mukherji

LAND OF FIVE RIVERS: STORIES
Selected and translated by Khushwant Singh
Orient Paperbacks, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 112,Rs.175.00

PHATIK CHAND
By Satyajit Ray. Translated from the Bangla by Lila Ray
Orient Paperbacks, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 112, Rs.150.00

THE SECOND WIFE
By Premchand. Translated from the Hindi by David Rubin
Orient Paperbacks, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 112, Rs.175.00

Languages are jealous sovereigns, and passports are rarely allowed for travellers to cross their strictly guarded boundaries. —Rabindranth Tagore

This trio of works, largely different from each other, is a collector's item for readers of fiction in the subcontinent, joined by history and tradition, but often separated by language, politics and some moments in history. Some are lucky and privileged to have several Indian languages, most of us are lucky if we have more than one, one's own, supplemented with English. More recently, most of us have acquired a smattering of Hindi, thanks to the early days of Doordarshan and Bollywood. One formally reads the third language for a couple of years in school and more often than not, nothing except the alphabet stays with us for the rest of our lives. So I shall think of these three translations as a treat for the Indian reader. If in the process, readers abroad get hold of them too, they will be duly enriched.

Let me begin with *Phatik Chand* written by Satyajit Ray. This novelette for children came out in 1983. I remember those heady years when those of us who had children or were children, waited with bated breath for the Autumn annuals because it was likely that several of them would contain a full work by Satyajit Ray—a Feluda (Satyajit's youthful and 'clean' Sherlock Holmes), a Professor Sankhu (his eccentric scientist), or another short story—and would end up buying all the volumes that contained his work. Most often these would have been read by or to the children even before the onset of the Puja vacation, and they were being discussed with joy all over town. "Not as good as …", "Definitely his best yet…" "Don't you love the illustrations in …" and so on.

Phatik Chand is one of these and was later made into a competent film by Sandip Ray, Satyajit's son. It is a whimsical tale and endorses every child's dream (or nightmare) of being kidnapped or lost and finding oneself in an exciting different world. The young hero forges an enviable relationship with his protector, a freelance juggler, one of the many performers to be seen in circuses or operating solo at Kolkata's Esplanade of a Sunday afternoon. It is a simple enough tale but written with suspense and humour and deft touches of understanding of the child's mind, particularly the child who lives within the claustrophobic and overly protective confines of the middle-class Kolkata home. With good children's literature in an Indian setting so thin on the ground, I would like to think it will be a popular gift for every child who cannot read the Bangla original. Lila Ray has done an excellent job of translation, sticking to the basics, following the original closely but not slavishly.

This is also true of the robust collection of Punjabi tales selected and/or edited and translated by Khushwant Singh. The Partition that so affected Punjab and Bengal runs movingly through many of the pithy narratives. Forced conversions, love, guilt, hatred, prejudice and anger rise and then disappear like the tsunami. Frequently a richer understanding takes their place. The best of these stories is Manto's 'Exchange of Lunatics', brilliantly translated by Khushwant Singh. He succeeds in retaining the quiet menace of Manto's anger at a mad world where it would appear the lunatic is the most sane and grounded (literally) in that no-man's land of Toba Tek Singh, between India and Pakistan, artificially and according to Manto, unnecessarily erected by barbed wires on either side of him. K.A. Abbas spins a violent story that leaves one feeling ashamed of any kind of preconceived notions about people and events.

Khushwant Singh singles out these two as the best, which they are. But the whole is a memorable collection of uninhibited presentations of people: the woman who pins all on her love affair with the doctor while her husband lies dying and useless in bed, the Oedipal son, who cannot make love to his bride in his mother's bed, or even with the aid of moonlight and the scent of jasmine. There is the brave Sardarji, the butt of so many bad jokes who can say with equanimity, "for us it is always twelve o'clock". The blind Soorma Singh with his exquisite singing voice and talking parrot, inspires suspicion in the breasts of Nihangs

> The translators knew nothing about language theory, but they possessed an intuition that shepherded them through tricky idioms or differences in local customs.

reduced to cooking in a gurdwara. There is Tai Eesri, who could be your favourite aunt or mine, dispenser of sweets, four-anna coins, general good cheer and a sense of well-being while successfully hiding her own sadness. All the stories are immensely readable and charming in their variety. The translation is everywhere elegant. The first and most important requirement of translation that the translator be not just competent in either language but also *au fait* with its culture is demonstrated here entirely. One needs to make no concessions, one reads for the sheer pleasure of the stories themselves. The best translator can efface himself and the act of translation and make the reader forget she is reading a translation.

I am afraid I cannot say this about the third of the three works sent to me for review. Premchand's *Nirmala* deserved a better translation than this one. The prose is turgid, too literal and misses the chatty quality of Premchand's writing, its irony and wit. It turns a great novel into a merely pathetic woman's story.

I began with a quotation from Tagore about languages being jealous sovereigns. There was a time not so long ago when there was a vibrant and thoroughly illegal world of translation between Indian languages, that ignored all subsequently enforced rules of author's copyright or translator's. In fact many of them could be acquired at Wheeler's bookstalls, railway stations, Puja pandals and other unlikely places, sometimes undated and usually without the name of the translator. These unnamed translators knew more than one Indian language and moved easily within cultures and customs akin to their own. Readers in Urdu, Hindi or even Kannada would then happily claim Saratchandra Chattopadhyaya or Bankimchandra as their own great novelists. The translators knew nothing about language theory, but they possessed an intuition that shepherded them through tricky idioms or differences in local customs. The books helped create an Indian community of voracious readers. They made a lot of money for fly-by-night publishers (printers more likely). I hope they made some for the translators too.

I must confess to a certain nostalgia for those days. I would much rather read Indian fiction in Indian languages. When that is not possible, a collection such as this is of course indispensable.■

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Portrait of a Family on Paper

Namrata Jain

YAAD KI REHGUZAR
By Shaukat Kaifi
Rajkamal Publications, New Delhi, 2006,
pp. 149, Rs. 150.00

A collage, a photo frame, a diary! No, none of these defines the flavour of the book. The memoirs are spun and crafted in a beautiful tea-cosy, much to Shaukat Kaifi's liking, keeping the incidents alive and warm. The title is suggestive of a collection of dates and events, people and places to construct and deconstruct a whole life. The following narrative offers a mirror image of her time, for the generations ahead. Acquiring a more autobiographical element, Shaukat begins from the beginning and tells her own story sequentially.

As the telling begins, two platforms or two modes of expression coalesce. In other words, a theatre artist turns writer or a writer brings to life her own theatre persona, thereby creating magic on paper and recreating her performances for the reader. It is here, that her real life unfolds and doubles up as any other character played by her on stage. Once again we find Shaukat performing! This time on paper.

As the story begins, it winds through many lanes and displays all possible colours and shades, as in Shaukat's *dupattas.* The 'Hyderabadi' Urdu maintains the period and context despite its transliteration in the Devanagari script. Undivided India, partitioned lives and chaste-unchaste episodes, all find their place in the book adding to the authenticity of the experiences. From minute details about the division of a rupee into 'paisa' and 'sers' to her scented clothes and her long lasting love lore, Shaukat keenly threads each of her memories and almost relives all her life while putting it on paper. The book offers scope for a graphical plotting of Shaukat's life. A life spent on the scale of riches and poverty moving vertically, one also sees a horizontal movement in a pre- to post-independence time frame. Thus it acquires a perspective and realizes the juxtapositions of the two scales. Even though Shaukat faced many a day of life with poverty, her life becomes exemplary due to her command over it.

The childhood allows a peek into the inner sanctums of a Muslim family, moderately liberal yet rooted. Girls and boys were educated and the veil was negated by Shaukat's father himself. Her father being an excise duty officer, the pattern of living and the utilities seem influenced by the British taste. However, *mushairas* or poetry sessions allowed a necessary space for new ideas and the progressive mood. Though the book presents a young girl's life at this juncture, it subtextually showcases an emerging face of the country's youth. The likes of Kaifi Azmi, Majrooh Sultanpuri, Sardar Jafri, P.C. Joshi, the progressive poets who worked for and influenced the masses with their new ideas of equality, liberal thoughts and humanitarian concerns. However, the narrative remains bereft of the chaos and unrest that arrested the country during Partition. Only the works of the left party find a mention but that also moves along the personal lives of a few of the comrades.

As the story progresses and Shaukat steps into her new life with Kaifi, the picture turns rosy. The tough time of struggle for love is over and Shaukat blooms into a wife, a companion for Kaifi Azmi.

The book provides a close-up and insights into the lives of Kaifi Azmi, Prithviraj Kapoor, Shabana Azmi, Balraj Sahni, Zohra Sehgal, all names to reckon with, she makes the reader not only read with her but also nearly live all these moments with her. As the descriptions become intense one sees more of the people in their social roles, barring Kaifi and Shabana who have also contributed to humanitarian causes time and again. The aura around Kaifi and Shabana Azmi finds ground through Shaukat's telling. Their combat against social ills and the passion with which the two approached their concerns highlight the deeper sides of the personalities.

The book revolves around Kaifi Azmi, his works and his poetry, Shaukat's plays and movies and Shabana's and Baba's lives. A portrait of a family on paper. The attempt to remember, recollect and recall all materialize into a series of events in her life which were influenced and moulded at various stages, literally and metaphorically. However, the telling entails a happy story where angelic friends, godfathers and godmothers make the journey easy. All the people that Shaukat or Kaifi encountered or came in contact with turn out to be nice human beings. At certain points the story seems fairy-tale-like and unreal. Or probably Shaukat chooses to filter out the rough patches from her memory. She locates and presents the beautiful moments at large and the lows of life find only a passing reference.

Cut to reality, and all's well that ends well. Though Shaukat craves for her dead companion, the ecstasy of their love lives on with her. Her daughter, Shabana, who used to sell coffee for her summer job is now an actress of international footing, a social worker and ex-MP. Her son is an established cameraman and she herself revels in her past and Kaifi's poetry. Life comes full circle as she pens *Yaad ki Rehguzar*.■

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Treatise on Urban Lives

Gurpreet K. Maini

TO EACH HER OWN: AN ANTHOLOGY OF CONTEMPORARY HINDI SHORT STORIES
Compiled and translated by Vandana R. Singh
National Book Trust, Delhi, 2006, pp. 216, Rs. 95.00

Ever since the translation of indigenous literature, mainly into English, was initiated almost a decade ago, it has triggered off reams of publications, and gradually evolved into a specific genre. Obviously, this process has been a tremendous success as publishing houses of renown have made forays into this sphere, though often glossing over prominent credits to the key player, i.e. the translator. The National Book Trust deserves credit for this well packaged, composite book on Hindi translations which acknowledges the vital cog in this whole process i.e., the compiler and translator on the cover.

The translation upsurge has spawned a subtle cultural renaissance by bridging the schism between the rural/urban readership and by facilitating a convergence among various regional microcosms in the country as a wealth of literary talent unravels in English.

At any rate, translations have largely been the handiwork of anglophiles, since the process of translation is not merely an elementary linguistic exercise but requires a bilingual expertise and dexterity; to capture the flavour of the colloquialisms of the terrain and the cultural nuances or mores imbued. This precisely defines Vandana Singh's translatory skills as she crafts, synergizes and sieves the essence of the piece while retaining its original flavour.

This compilation amalgamates the multiple facets of the contemporary urbanized social segment, presented by a dramatis personae from this very strata. They feel emotionally inept as they physically pace ahead at breakneck speed gasping to cope with the multifarious roles they jostle with. These impressionistic pieces are not assumptions or presumptions but a treatise on urban lives. They have culminated into literary fabrications but seem like excerpts from our daily lives, the emotional turmoil and the protagonists reactions are familiar, too.

Vandana has culled her stories most appropriately as each one depicts the myriad issues and conflicts that have arisen as technology, rapid consumerism and westernization impact the urbanscape. The players in this scenario must reinvent, reassess and strategize themselves, their interactions with each other and how they relate to a habitat in flux. For instance, a pertinent issue with the technologically infused and surcharged milieu is the use of artificial insemination by childless couples. The last but certainly not the least, absorbing and moving story is 'Third Presence' by Rekha. The true feelings that emanate from the spouse of a woman who is artificially impregnated—"it was a cold, sterilized moment, pierced by the tip of a needle, a false note in the melody of life. Etherised. As though an evil spirit had appeared and what could have been the most beautiful moment of our lives was made unholy, impure by his presence" (p. 207).

Vandana's lens also focuses on social malaises like 'wife swapping' concealed in the urban underbelly. Chitra Mudgal's story is an interesting rendition of extant hypocrisy in interpersonal relationships despite the perfunctory strides of modernization. The title of this story is used for the book. The prize-winning story by Alka Saraogi 'Aak Egarasi' is a fascinating and surreal presentation of an idealistic youth's yearning for utopia. Her other heartrending story is of a modern woman's dilemma in counterbalancing motherhood, her career and her plight. In a similar strain, Mannu Bhandari's 'A New Job' manifests the frustration a woman feels when for her husband his profession is a priority, whereas domesticity is defined as hers. Her helplessness is drowned in the unwritten rules and conventions even contemporary women must comply with.

Women vie with men to share the social scape on an equal footing in the story 'The Other'. As the feelings and perceptions of both are juxtaposed, the man is overwhelmed by suspicion and envy towards his wife. "Suddenly Bhagirath detested Neelam and her suggestive mannerisms. She is totally engrossed in the discussion but doesn't forget to draw attention to herself, now a toss of the head, now a fluttering of the eyelashes, it seems she can't be still. If I hold her head in place she'll probably not be able to speak. There's a limit to being spirited and exhibiting your zest for life. How conveniently the pallav of her sari has slipped to one side completely revealing her midriff and exposing her waist and breasts" (p. 88).

Today's social scenario is gripped by the tentacles of communalism which mar the harmony of communities as they dwell in juxtaposition. Nasira Sharma skilfully engages with this malaise in her story 'Hunger'.

Amidst the multiple facets of a rapidly changing urban milieu, the diasporic presence is an essential constituent of most families. It symbolizes enormous economic remunerations to families and countries but the emotional vicissitudes with which it grapples are reflected in the realms of literature. The emotional dilemmas in the minds of the first generation of immigrants who migrated on attaining their adulthood and particularly their confused identity syndrome is manifested in Mridula Garg's 'Alias Sam'. They have a strong urge to grope for their cultural roots back home whereas their children are not ABCDs any longer but authentic Americans, so both generations cannot synchronize their relationships with each other, or their environs. "Archie and Katy have long forgotten that their names used to be Arjun and Kavita. They are married to some Susan and George; their children Bob, John etc. are named after their American grandparents, and they don't like to remember their coloured Indian relatives. Once a month, Archie and Katy speak to him over the phone and for Christmas and Easter he receives cakes, turkey and other gifts from them. There are any number of men and women of his age there with him, so how could he possibly be alone, they reason out with him."

The context of the power struggles and space-sharing whether in the domestic or professional sphere is conflict ridden. This compendium would be incomplete without a discussion on marital disharmony in the wake of modernization. The Story of Manjul Bhagat's 'A Tattered Doll' is a take on the subject.

An interesting paradox is manifested, Neha is ready to live with an impotent husband but this society which otherwise looks at sex as a blasphemous reality considers it as an imperative for conjugal sustenance and bliss. If divorce is discussed then the experience of a second marriage is not far behind, a common occurrence in Gitanjali Shree's 'Beyond the Blind Turn'. As the protagonist leaves an economically deprived man to move in with her affluent boss, she soon tires of him, her life seems inane as the emotional bonds do not germinate, so she eventually aborts his child which spells her liberation. The woman's body is used by both men as a whimsical domain as neither values her entity or her emotional yearning, so she seizes authority over her body and disconnects the meaningless seed herself.

Krishna Sobti's stories, despite their brevity are moving. However, 'Don't Be Afraid' 'I'll Protect You' and 'Lama' are a trifle out of sync with the thematic kernel of urbanization. I suppose a mixed bag is there for dramatic relief in typified monotony.

Be it Alka Saraogi, Chitra Mudgal, Geetanjali Shree, Krishna Sobti, Mamta Kalia, Manjul Bhagat, Mannu Bhandari, Mridula Garg, Nasira Sharma, Rajee Seth or Rekha, each story has a distinct facet, as they are deftly pieced together to depict an urban jigsaw with its gamut of fads and foibles.

Though the essential trajectory of the book is gender-oriented, the protagonists do not merely wallow in the issues restricted to their gender but transgress to comment on the contemporary urban space where they are equal constituents. If at all there is gender addressal, the protagonists have reinvented their strategies and themselves.■

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Biography of a City

Madhavi Apte

PRARAMBH: A NOVEL
By Gangadhar Gadgil. Translated from the Hindi by Arvind Dixit
National Book Trust, India, 2006, pp. 640, Rs. 240.00

Prarambh is a successful blend of history and fiction: a hi-story of the beginnings of Mumbai. The environment of the early 1800s is authentically depicted, the characters that are both real and fictional match quite well, and the story runs both as fact and fiction blended. The National Book Trust of India must be thanked and congratulated for bringing it out in English for the benefit of not only the non-Marathi Indian readers but also the international readers who will be able to get important insights into and information about the social-cultural-business renaissance that gave its initial shape to the internationally significant city, Mumbai.

Prarambh, The Beginning, is quite an authentic translation. While going through the English translation of the novel, one does not get a feel of reading a translation. It reads like it is naturally written in English. There are minor inconsistencies: at one place what is given as a Marathi term '*drishta*' (p. 22), has been later described as "a ritual to ward off the evil eye"(p. 64), or sati (p.123) and wife immolation (p. 124). On the one hand, it is not possible to find a parallel for everything in the target language as the two languages are culturally poles apart, and on the other hand, arbitrary translation spoils the cultural charm. Arvind Dixit has been successful in keeping the balance between the two languages, by and large.

It is a novel of the Raj period from an Indian-Marathi point of view. E.M. Forster, Rudyard Kipling and Paul Scott wrote novels from the British point of view. The Bengali-English novel like *Gora* (by Rabindranath Tagore) was more of a social-political novel like the ones written by other Indian authors. But most of the Indian novels written on the themes from the Raj period (for example, the novels of Mulk Raj Anand, Sane Guruji and others), are stereotypes describing the tyranny of the British rulers and the political resistance and freedom struggle of the Indians. Though this novel is historical, it is more of a narration of the process of social-cultural, political and economic (business) change bringing about enlightenment. It presents details of how all the institutions of rule like administration, education, justice, trade and economic equality between the rulers and the ruled, equal rights of people of different religions and castes had to be sorted out by putting heads together. Hindus had problems of going against their religion right from learning a foreign language, to the printing ink of the books to equal opportunity to education for all castes. The British dignitaries and officers with the local, progressive elite had to overcome the very strong resistance of the people in initiating those institutions of enlightenment. Nana Shankarshet was a pillar of support to all the progressive dynamics of the changing social-religious thinking. He acted as a mediator between the *gora sahibs* and the natives in every respect bringing about a convergence among clashing beliefs. Such multiple dimensions are rarely known to Indian fiction on themes from the Raj, and it is the first of its kind which portrays a city and its men—both as prominent characters. It shows the British dignitaries and officers (Governor Elphinstone, Captain Jarvis, Mr. Murphy, Dr. MacLean) and the local Indian leaders (Jagannath Shankarshet, Framjee Cawasjee, Jamshetji Jeejibhai and others) working hand in hand for the overall development of Mumbai. It depicts very positively, the British initiatives in the areas of better infrastructural developments like roads and bridges, education for the native Indians in their mother tongues like Marathi, Gujrati, Kannada etc. It takes a very positive, objective and fair view of benevolent Britishers such as Governor Elphinstone or Captain Jarvis. It does not portray the British or the Company government as always positive. But with regard to Mumbai and its administrators, it takes a realistic view and gives them their due.

All through the novel, the process of the development of Mumbai is described in detail and the events take place in the life of the city rather than in the lives of human characters. Events in the lives of human characters appear incidentally, only of secondary importance to events in the life of the city. The protagonist of the novel is Mumbai (Aroon Tikekar in his 'Foreword' to the novel) and the work is more of a biography of the city of Mumbai though the architects of the city are in action all the time.

The novel portrays the social leadership with progressive thinking among the religious, business elites of that period and presents how a resourceful local leadership can take the society forward in all walks of life. The leaders of the then Mumbai were genuinely interested in the welfare of the society, constructively engaged in putting their own resources into its development. Today's Mumbai is the outcome of the change in the values and beliefs of the leaders.

The novel details the beginnings of the British educational system. The account of starting a school in Mumbai which would also be acceptable to the local people presents interesting details of the social-religious thinking of those times and how the pioneers had to face problems in making education available to Indians whether it was general or medical education. Consideration of the multifarious problems that would arise, the complexities of that social-political order, the solutions sought, the vision and foresight of Governor Elphinstone, the active interest of the local Parsee and Hindu leaders are all dealt with in realistic detail. Gangadhar Gadgil's perception of and insight into the thinking of the people of the early 1800s and his realistic imagination of how people like Elphinstone, Warden, Captain Jarvis, Jagannath Shankarshet and others would have discussed those issues makes the then Mumbai come alive to readers of the 21st century.

Pune-Mumbai as cities of distinct character keep reoccurring in their social-attitudinal and political comparisons and contrasts in different contexts, as part of either the dialogue or the narrative. The Peshwa-British ruling style comparisons make apparent the distinctions between regional and cosmopolitan life styles reflected in the styles of their rule. Basically, they reflect the distinction between the liberal western philosophy of democratic as well as scientific orientation and the religion-dominated ethnocentric thinking of the Indians. The downfall of the Peshwa and Maratha rule have been presented from a completely different angle. One has read history or fiction only with a sympathetic attitude to the defeated local rulers. This novel presents a more realistic view of the fall of these dynasties. It overcomes narrow ethnocentric or parochial or even nationalistic ways of looking at history.

Women of the times (p. 32) had a role only during the celebrations and festivities and Gadgil depicts how they loved and looked forward to such occasions to have their say in the decisions of the family. Yamunabai, the widowed sister-in-law of Abashastri had the final word in many family decisions as the eldest of the family. On the other hand, one reads the account of the sati of Jag Mohan Roy which made Raja Ram Mohan Roy take a definite stand against the custom of sati. Against this backdrop, Abashastri, wondering what was wrong in this custom, is a little surprised that while his own widowed sister-in-law seems to influence the family decisions and does not commit sati after her husband's death, he has not given any thought to the problems of widows.

As I read *Prarambh*, I was considering how I had to make a list of Indian and foreign friends to whom I could gift this novel as they would love to go through it and would definitely appreciate the gift.■

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Untouchability and Humanity

Madhav Vaze

KIRWANT
By Premanand Gajvee. Translated from the Marathi by M.D. Hatkanangalekar
Seagull Books, Kolkata, 2005, pp. 88, Rs. 150.00

Emergence of the dalit theatre is considered as one of the prime aspects of the post-independence Marathi theatre. Marathi theatre which was centered around the middle-class sensibility till then, witnessed for the first time, the low-born, the underdogs of the society, giving vent to the unprecedented humiliation and persecution that they were subjected to, down the centuries. The leit-motif of dalit theatre was the attack on the caste system, its cunning. It sought to provoke fellow members to assert their identity. In a frenzy of profound hatred for the high-born, dalit theatre, more often than not, turned impulsive; consequently, arbitrary content, episodic structure and derogatory language came to be known as the main features of dalit theatre. However, considering the immediacy of the problem, such inarticulateness was but natural.

Whereas the then leading playwrights of dalit theatre, such as B.S. Shinde, Texas Gaikwad and the likes of them confined themselves only to the rift between the brahmans and the dalits, the then young Premanand Gajvee, to the utter dismay of his contemporaries struck a rather discordant note. He looked at the centuries old problem of untouchability in a wider perspective. His short play, *Ghotbhar Paani* (A Sip of Water), for example, depicts how the high-born don't allow the dalits to fetch water from the wells in villages and thus deprive them of even a sip of water. It is significant that he does not give his characters any names or make a specific caste his target. He continually suggests that in the larger context and in the final analysis untouchability concerns humanity. It's not without reason that that the line, *Maatich Maatila Milu Det Nahi Ghobtbhar Paani* (Soil itself doesn't allow the soil to have a sip of water), occurs repeatedly as the theme-line in the play. It is suggestive of the humanitarianism that forms the core of Gajvee's writings. This rather radical approach to the sufferings of dalits marks Gajvee as a playwright with a difference. But then Gajvee felt alienated from the literary coterie of both the dalits and the brahmans. Dalits marked him off as the dalit brahman and for the brahmans he was forever a dalit! However, Gajvee was not deterred from his humanitarianism, such snubs notwithstanding.

In his endeavour to point out what man has made of man, Gajvee by chance came to know a factual story wherein a section of brahmans was said to have outcast another brahman for having violated the so-called code of conduct. The story reinforced Gajvee's conviction that caste hierarchy existed even among the brahmans. By writing a play based on the story, Gajvee was to hit the ball back into the brahmans' court and make them realize that the stigma of untouchability was attached to their community too!

That's how Gajvee came to write his much-discussed play *Kirwant*. The protagonist of the play, Siddheshwar is by profession a Kirwant brahman who performs funeral rites for the dead. He quite innocently performs a public Satyanarayan Mahapuja in the town. The other brahmans, who consider the Kirwant and the low-caste as having the same abominable status, drive away Siddheshwar unceremoniously. He walks away meekly without uttering a single word of protest. He does not speak about the incident to his wife Revati or to his younger brother, Vasudeo. However, Vasudeo, a radical youth comes to know about the insult hurled at his elder brother and seeks an explanation from his brother himself. Siddheshwar puts up the defence that he didn't have the strength to ask Digambarshastri and his flatterers for an explanation. However, for Vasudeo, it is more a question of one's conscience than strength. Vasudeo vows to turn the tables on the so-called upper-caste brahmans and eventually forces his brother to refuse to perform the funeral rites at the death of Venkatashastri's mother. The Shastris resolve to call yet another Kirwant from the neighbouring town and boycott Siddheshwar once and for all. Trapped between the Shastris and Vasudeo, and continually dogged by poor Revati who feels utterly helpless, Siddheshwar surrenders to the brahmans and seeks to do penance. He is asked to kill Vasudeo who in the eyes of the brahmans is the main culprit. Unable to stand the shock, Siddheshwar begins to have hallucinations and eventually dies of a massive attack. Revati, having realized that her son Madhu would have to lead the rest of his life as a Kirwant, hands over to him the book on funeral rites. Vasudeo vows never to marry, so that for him at least, the Kirwant genealogy would not continue.

If the function of the theatre is to broaden and deepen one's perception of life, *Kirwant* is sure to make a good theatre. It is true that the play probes into the appalling nature of the caste system; however it does not sound didactic or temporal. Gajvee captures the complexity and the totality of the trauma with great discernment and offers the theatre one more profound tragedy. *Kirwant* may remind one of *Hamlet* in that it also centres around one's conscience; it also vehemently asserts the urgency to act according to one's conscience.

That Gajvee allows undue space to the secondary characters and situations could be said to be the only shortcoming of the play; with minor characters taking centrestage for a pretty long time, the play at times loses tempo and sounds quite dull.

Kirwant was first published and performed in Marathi in 1991. Seagull Books of Kolkata published it in English translation in 2005. One can see that it took almost 15 years for a Marathi playwright to reach the English readership. It would be in the interest of the theatre if the publishers could publish the play when it is actually on. Nonetheless, Seagull Books deserves merit for publishing translations in English of major Indian plays.

The original Marathi play is translated into English by Professor M.D. Hatkanangalekar, the revered literary critic and translator. Professor Hatkanangalekar has been closely associated with the parallel Marathi theatre over the last three decades or so. The translation in question, to put it in a nutshell, is absolutely apt and entirely in tune with the overall spirit of the play. Now it is for the English theatre to put the play on the boards! ■

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Relocating the Modern Ethos

N. Manu Chakravarthy

INNOO ONDU
By Vivek Shanbhag
Akshara Prakashana, Karnataka, 2006, price not stated.

The modernist movement (*navya*) in Kannada literature was significant in many ways. The *navya* writers created an idiom which even to this day resonates with the many new twists that came into the "being" of a literary work. The idiom of the *navya* writers was multi-dimensional and accommodated varied experiences and diverse ideas. However, the divergences that emerged from the writings of the 'navya' poets, short story writers, novelists and playwrights did have an underlying element of commonality—of examining the existential state of the modern individual situated as she/he was in a modernizing community/nation with very strong traditional roots. The *navya* writers were deeply preoccupied with the multiple realities of individuals, communities and societies in transition. Hence, in them, tradition and modernity are juxtaposed as antithetical bases upon which individuals inevitably rest, and, more importantly confront their dualities, contradictions and paradoxes.

The *navya* writers worked out elements of existential angst, despair, self doubt when portraying individual existence, and created images of alienation, loss of selfhood and the search for identity while describing social realities. The works of the 'navya' tradition extended the framework of conventional literary expression and experience by raising basic questions about the nature of societies, whether traditional or modern, and the choices of individuals in relation to their personal and social selves. This vital dimension of the *navya* tradition continues to shape the consciousness of Kannada writers after three decades and, more interestingly, even in those who oppose the *navya* tradition for various reasons.

Vivek Shanbhag is one of the younger generation of writers with a full and open exposure to the *navya* and other literary movements of Kannada literature after it, like the '*Bandaya*' and the dalit movements which gave expression to the muted voices of the marginalized and the oppressed and opened up many realms that had not been significantly noticed or recognized till then. Vivek has published four collections of short stories, a play and *Innoo Ondu* is his first novel. A rough translation of the title would be "Yet another".

As a land, as a territory and as a consciousness Karnataka, like India in general for that matter, has changed quite beyond recognition. Both the landscape and the mindscape of Karnataka, especially during the last two decades, have gone through momentous changes, at times quite unbelievably dramatic, making it necessary for a writer to capture the spirit of the times with a consciousness that never overlooks the intricacies of these changes that apparently look different and separate. In other words the changes have been shaped by the forces of a 'new modernity' quite radically different from what appeared as 'the modern' four or five decades ago. It is this 'neo-modern' element that a writer like Vivek Shanbhag tries to capture in his novel *Innoo Ondu*. In this sense the novel's narrative structure has a striking resemblance to the narrative mode employed by the *navya* writers. But in terms of the new aesthetics the novel unfolds, and in its thematic preoccupations the novel is truly a new incarnation that reshapes and reconstitutes our understanding of the spirit of modernity—in relation to both the world and the characters it brings before us.

The different characters and the varied spaces they inhabit that the novel portrays represent the fragmentary nature of the world we live in and the chaotic, irregular, unsteady beliefs, attitudes and values that form our consciousness. There is nothing homogeneous or unitary either in the external world or in our own interior spaces, which we mark through our articulations—emotional and ideational. Yet, underneath this seemingly anarchic pattern there is a very subtle and sophisticated mosaic of unity that each one tries to comprehend and attain. On the one hand, the novel is about a young, emancipated girl, Swathi, who is trying to come to terms with all her relationships—her boyfriend whom she cannot relate to anymore; her mother, a well-known dancer who is conscious of her ageing and is struggling to preserve her beautiful exterior; and, very importantly, a profession she wishes to excel at. Swathi is irritated by the idle curiosity of her boyfriend who pries into her personal world and is equally vexed by her semi-modern mother who, at every given opportunity, peeps into her daughter's private spaces. Moving from one situation to another, Swathi is the modern girl in an urban world struggling hard to determine her identity as an individual.

On the other, the novel is, in a distinct way, all about Kashyap, mysterious, fascinating, and, even, eccentric. Kashyap is particularly interested in studying the ecology of the western Ghats, is specifically preoccupied with the amazing world of butterflies, is interested in almost everything under the sun, passing his 'expert comments' on them all, and is equally an expert at cooking. More mysterious than the man is his 'origins' which he always seems to fictionalize but consistently keeps referring to. Kashyap, as a scientist, an environmentalist, a connoisseur, is an urban creature trying to find his identity through his 'origins'.

The protagonist of the novel, also the narrator, Manohara, is the one who is at ease with all these characters and attempts to understand them without making any value judgements, which, remarkably enough reflects the open vision of the work itself. Manohara is from a non-urban locale and through him one enters the landscape of remote Uttara Karnataka, far removed from the urban cosmopolis, and the mindscape of non-urban individuals with their values, concerns, dreams, aspirations and struggles. What is of supreme importance is that there is in that remote world a dynamism, a life rhythm in no way inferior to what one usually associates only with the urban landscape. It is through Manohara that we get a clear, unprejudiced view of the richness and complexity of life in those parts of the world, which would, in passing, appear unrelated to the modern spaces most people belong to.

Innoo Ondu through its shifting narrative structure, its multiple images of diverse landscapes and its seemingly fragmentary pictures of different individuals, subverts all our conventional views, opinions and ideologies as far as space, time and human behaviour and attitudes are concerned. The novel achieves this by eliminating all binary opposites that we have constructed about tradition and modernity, the urban and the rural, the past, the present and the future and the local and the universal. The subversion succeeds in fusing all surfacial contraries and posits a holistic point of view which integrates the urban and the rural, the neo-modern and the non-modern and the present and the past. It is for this reason that even when we look at the remote world of Kumta and its unsophisticated people we get a glimpse of the modern spirit in the landscape and in the consciousness of those individuals. In fact Manohara's uncle Yashwanth is one individual, who, in the ambience of a so-called unevolved environment, takes the radical step of owning up to his relationship with Champa, who, going by conventional parlance, is a 'mistress'.

Innoo Ondu, through its consciously structured disjointed narrative style compels us to understand the nature of a neo-modern world where 'the origins' of individuals, places, institutions, systems of knowledge and bases of experiences are multi-layered, complex and inextricably bound to one another. The search for authenticity of the self leads to the exploration of one's roots, which inevitably means

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digging into one's past and, perhaps, going back to one's original landscape, which, of course, has undergone such a transformation in a neo-modern world that one cannot even figure it out with any degree of certainty. It is then, perhaps, that it becomes a necessity for each individual in such a neo-modern world to correlate with the past by disowning/disinheriting what it used to be then, and by trying to recover its identity through a new self shaped by a new world. The paradoxical/contradictory relationship between the rural and the modern, the non-modern and the neo-modern, the urban individual and the rural one is what *Innoo Ondu* explores with enormous energy, but in a restrained manner, a characteristic feature of Vivek Shanbhag's writings.

Innoo Ondu is a rich metaphorical work that is deeply rooted in the conflicting realities of the heterogeneous landscapes and mindscapes of Karnataka. It is a work that is remarkably rich in its vivid description of local worlds even as it abounds in thick descriptions of individuals in modern spaces enveloped by a 'wanderlust' spirit. The manner in which the novel explores the hidden terrains of the physical world and the submerged areas of individual consciousness without privileging either of them enables it to throw up fresh images of modern life without any ideological or philosophical hierarchy overriding them. *Innoo Ondu* images the complex, multiple realities of a neo-modern world eliminating all irritating conclusive judgements that mark most of our narratives. This Kannada novel reads not merely the realities of the cosmos it describes, but reflects the paradoxical and contradictory spirit of our times. *Innoo Ondu*, "Yet another", only means that our modern civilization needs to make yet another attempt to recognize and understand its nature.■

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New Thresholds

Deepa Ganesh

ALEGALALLI ANTARANGA
By Vaidehi
Akshara Prakashana, Karnataka, Rs. 400.00

One of the main missions of Vaidehi, among the most compelling Kannada women writers of our times is the retrieval of the woman's voice from the past. That suppressed past which gains a voice in the present, even while it continues to exist in more nuanced textures.

Alegalalli Antaranga is a compilation of Vaidehi's short stories written over the last three decades. In the 80-odd short stories, spread into six collections, Vaidehi steers clear of jingoistic announcements of feminist positions, but presents the perspective of a woman as it affected her, from the politics of everyday life. Therefore, the stories mostly capture the woman's real world, her real experiences, and the various aspects of self-fashioning, without taking overt, ideological stances.

Vaidehi is one of the most unusual voices we have in Kannada today. So unusual that she is among the pioneers who enriched the world of Kannada literature; not only with a forceful picturization of the women of her own community; a village in Dakshina Kannada, but also opened up a new worldview with a refreshingly new spoken language. Even as she gave voice to the women of her environs, Vaidehi was at the same time also speaking of the several women who occupied different geographical spaces and time frames, but sharing their story with the women who inhabited her backyard. Therefore, even in being strongly rooted—in a specific geographical location with a distinct language dialect—Vaidehi's stories achieve a pan-Indian sweep.

In *Lekha Loka*, talking about herself, the times she was born into and the stories she wrote, Vaidehi says: "I don't want to list the details of the condition of women as I witnessed it. Because, I think that was the plight of women elsewhere in the country too. What I however wish to recount are some of the compelling elements that I saw and experienced in my growing up years, in the world around me. Needless to say that it was this little universe, packed with forceful experiences that helped me blossom into a writer."

Traditionally, women have been storytellers. Timeless epics have acquired local dimensions; the grand epics have been told and retold. Not to forget the abundant folk literature, this, even with its seemingly broad objective base and universal dimensions, was chronicling a period, its values and its outlook, and was hence subjective. From being passive narrators of stories, there is the middle phase when stories gained a woman's perspective, more so in folk literature. I speak of that point when there were speculations if Ahalya's choice was a conscious one or an unconscious one. From then to now, it has been a long journey; there is a marked transition. Women now tell stories that emerge from their lived life experiences and memories. Now it is gladly unabashed. It is that forthright telling of history that clearly doesn't intend to exclude or lose either the woman's voice or her silences.

As Vaidehi herself puts it, there was a clear demarcation between the outside world; with its loud, authoritative voices (the *chavadi* and beyond), and the inside world; entrenched in its poignant, disquieting silences (the kitchen, the backyard and a little more). Most of Vaidehi's narratives are invariably set against the backdrop of these two distinct worlds—the outer realm with its imposing voice and the inner realm shut into a silence. The tension in negotiating these two worlds, often perceived as infringement, seen as protest by the patriarchal order, makes for the plot of most Vaidehi's stories. The silent, slow, step-by-step, self-assured strides of the inner world towards the outer world, result not only in conflict, but also in a "violence of accommodation". Vaidehi's women are almost always a product of their situation, hence their negotiations are unstated. It is therefore never a grand agenda that is consciously devised. One sees a peculiar tension between public and private realities that underwrites most of her writing.

'Akku' from her collection *Anatarangada Putagalu* is Vaidehi's most haunting story. It is the story of Akku, a zany middle-aged woman, who takes on the world in her state of madness. Akku's good-for-nothing husband suddenly disappears, and Akku goes around imagining she's pregnant. Vaidehi's Akku, the "dark double" gives a hearing to her simmering anxiety and rage. In an interview, Vaidehi speaks of how the "mad" woman "serves as a device that allows her to write with a certain degree of freedom about issues that are sensitive."

To write in their own terms, women have constantly found methods of subversion. While some have taken to humour to couch the drudgery of domesticity, others have sought solace in poetry for the sheer possibility of hiding emotions behind dressed-up words. Akku, to me, appears as one such strong case of insurrection, in her not being normal. There hangs an air of uneasy silence with Ajjaya's iron fist controlling the breath of every occupant of the house, but nothing or nobody can put a stop to Akku living life entirely on her terms—a man's prerogative. Not even when she is brutally clobbered. The vigilant Akku and her indomitable spirit refuse to be suppressed by the heartless wounds inflicted on her. She continues to scream to the world of male hypocrisies that often get quietly brushed under the carpet. So much so, in her version of the world around her, the distinction between Akku

as a conscience-keeper and a tattletale is blurred; the distinction between truth and untruth. As Lakshmi Holmstrom puts it, Akku, in her state of madness, converts all her "humiliations into triumphs".

Even while achieving a complex, multi-pronged victory through the character of Akku, Vaidehi makes her plot more complex with women like Siriyatte and Doddatte, who have been successfully normalized by a male order; they turn out to be as cruel as the men. Jyoti Puri in "Woman, Body, Desire in Post-colonial India: Narratives of Gender and Sexuality" very rightly observes: "The narratives of middle-class women on matters of gender and sexuality point towards class-based social regulation of women not through overt coercion but through the process of normalization. Social control in this form is far more insidious." Therefore, when Akku's sister Siriyatte derisively narrates the story of Akku's reaction,—to her wedding finery, her ramblings about the transitory life of beauty, and what she calls a driveller's chatter on the unequal man-woman relationship—it robs you of the sympathies for Siriyatte turning her into a cold, ruthless tyrant. It works similarly in the episode where Doddatte eggs on Vasu to ask unkind questions about her imagined motherhood. Vaidehi, at these junctures, prompts her readers to redefine established notions of binary opposites, of the oppressor and the oppressed. It is clearly not man against woman. She sharply highlights that the dynamics are clearly that of a patriarchal order and as it conditioned women. This to me elevates Akku from fiction to reality.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* observes how in relations of power it is possible to retain the idea of multiple, fluid structures of domination which intersect to locate women differently at particular historical conjunctures, while at the same time insisting on the dynamic oppositional agency of individuals and collectives and their engagement in daily life. 'Chandale' also part of the same collection, leaves you completely shaken.

A young girl confesses to her neighbour Rami that she desires to be a prostitute. Rami goes through major emotional upheavals, not because she is disturbed by the young girl's extreme impulse to break away from oppressive social norms and fantasy of a free sexual life as liberating. But because she imagines the teenager soliciting every other man in the neighbourhood—including her husband and son. Rami is interested in neither investigating the context out of which such a desire is born nor the reasons for it.

Vaidehi, with her forceful narrative, seems to raise the question of sexual codes and how it operates in the many layers of the community. One finds Rami, who wears the tag of a liberal, indulging in very stringent notions of "right" and "wrong", "proper" and "improper". So much so that she is constantly morphing Chandale—a young prostitute from her past, her body language and her gestures, on this young girl, in her present. With most part of the story set in the mindscape of Rami, the writer seems to very sharply attack our conception of violation. What then is a greater transgression? That which takes place in the realm of the mind or that which takes place in the realm of the body?

In 'Sougandhiya Swagatagalu' she attacks the basic construct of femaleness itself. Docility that is regarded as a high virtue for the woman gets cleverly turned into a vice, an inability to attract the opposite sex. So much so that Sougandhi's parents come close to dubbing her as sexually dormant. Much that Sougandhi desires to scream from rooftops that she wouldn't even mind being raped—contrary to what the world thinks of her—she is trapped. Not only in an image, but also in a devious traditional society that has a suit-yourself attitude to modernity.

Even with the danger of sounding far-fetched, one feels that the story is true of the time in which it was written (1991)—the coming of satellite television and the rise of the advertising industry. As Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan says in her *Real and Imagined Women*, the woman who attracts stares from a man on the street, bus or in any other public space – a harrowing experience of everyday sexist harassment for women—is imaged as the ideal of the attractive and sexually desirable woman. You find these echoed in the lines of Sougandhi's father in the story. Nevertheless, as Susie Tharu says, the discourses of our time will constitute our world as much as they do our subjectivities.

'Gulabi Talkies Mattu Sanna Alegalu', 'Shakuntaleyondige Kaleda Aparahna', 'Ammacchiyemba Nenapu', 'Abha' are among the other striking narratives by Vaidehi. Her earlier stories, particularly from the collection *Mara Gida Balli*, pale in comparison to her later ones, both in form and content.

Resistance in Vaidehi's stories is at once subtle and powerful. Subtle because it doesn't gratify in celebratory feminist positions, powerful because it attacks the basic construct of a traditional society, even as she recognizes that modernity is not complete in itself. Powerful also because her stories do not revolve around "small moments of nay-saying", but privilege both objective and action.

Vaidehi is clearly a product of her times: the seventies with its 'second wave' of feminism. Therefore one finds in her works the smell of jasmines, tinkling anklets, dark kitchens as well as a movement into thresholds marked "strictly for men". There is an awakening of desire and an awareness of sexuality. If multiple ambiguities exist, even that is true.■

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Many Hues of Realism

Parsa Venkateshwar Rao Jr

GOLD NUGGETS: SELECTED POST-INDEPENDENCE TELUGU SHORT STORIES
Edited by Bh. Krishnamurti and C. Vijayashree
Sahitya Akademi, Delhi, 2004, Rs. 225.00

It appears that the editors of this anthology of English translation—Bh. Krsihnamurti, a linguistics man and former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Hyderabad, and C. Vijayashree, Professor of English at Osmania University—did not have much of a choice. They have translated a Telugu anthology put together by Vakati Panduranga Rao and Vedagiri Rambabu after a three-day workshop in 1997. This was published in 2001. Krishnamurti and Vijayashree have presented thirty of the original sixty published in the Telugu collection. It is to be taken that the English editors agreed with the choice made by the Telugu editors. Of course, the final rap and commendation for the anthology in this English version squarely belong to Krishna-murti and Vijayashree.

This might appear to be a trivial issue but it assumes importance after the Penguin edition of Telugu short stories edited by Ranga Rao, which was focused and sharp, and there was a critical awareness of the translation process as well. Those qualities which marked the Penguin edition are not to be found in this one as a general principle. It is not that we are looking for a manifesto of translation. The critical sensibility that we associate with an anthology seems to be absent here. And it appears to be more a bureaucratic failure, and no one but the Sahitya Akademi has to take the blame for it. It is strange that the Sahitya Akademi, which is in many ways a robustly independent body compared to the other Akademis has not learned to sharpen its skills of literary judgment and presentation.

This book presents short stories of the last sixty years—though it was originally selected to celebrate the 50 years of Independence—and they have been presented in a chronological order. That is a good thing because as you read through you can sense the changes, not that there are too many of them or that they are too radical. The exceptions are, of course, Kolakuluri Enoch's 'The Village Well' and Boya Jangayya's 'Ants'. They voice protest in a creative manner, and the authors have adopted a strategy of subterfuge as it were in their narratives. You are bowled over by the sheer vibrancy of the story, and the political message of revolution erupting unheralded is an afterthought as it were. And that is what good writing is all about—the purpose of the story is refracted, and the impact is made.

While Jangayya excels in creating an atmosphere sizzling with the act and action, Enoch brings in the prowess of a great writer in embedding the minutiae of life and work. And one is tempted to ask for more of the work of these two writers and others like them. As a matter of fact, these stories imbued with the spirit of the politics of hardship and hatred are so readable because many creative writers of the political protest stuff fail to serve up a good story in the first place, and are content to rest on the virtue of exposing a social evil. Enoch and Jangayya understand that such naivete would not do.

The two stories at the beginning of the anthology, Chaso's "The Choice" (1947) and Palagummi Padmaraju's 'The Boat Moves On' (1948), present a wistful picture of the middle-class writer looking into the heart of the poor people. Both of them are well-told stories, with a deep understanding of human psychology. Chaso's realism, which resembles more Dostoyevski than Maxim Gorki, displays ruthless honesty as well as compassion. The daughter of a leper is asked by her father to choose a blind man for a husband rather than a lame one. And the father argues his point on the basis of inexorable logic, the heartless logic of a harsh world, which derives from a primordial life source rather than a distorted social reality. And the girl, Erri's despair and helplessness are described in a laconic style: it seems to evoke Aristotelian pity and fear, and, yes, at the end of it there is a sense of catharsis as well.

Padmaraju's story is mild, romantic and melancholic. This is the tale of Rangi—the woman bears the drunkard and unfaithful lover Peddalu's petty crimes, including thieving and beating her up. When the genteel, middle-class narrator asks Rangi: "Then, why don't you walk out on him?" she replies: "I feel exactly like that when he thrashes me. Still, there is no man like him, sir. You don't know, sir. When he is sober, he is very tender, and he melts like butter. Even if he carries on with a hundred women, he will always come back to me. If he doesn't find me, won't he die of a heart-break?" This is an unlettered woman's testament of life and love, something that goes against the feminist credo of self-respect and survival. But life and love are what Rangi says—unjust, unfair, and yet overpowering. And it does not seem to matter that Chaso and Padmaraju are not poor themselves. They are not merely empathizing

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with the plight of the very poor. They have been able to reach out, in the manner of good creative writers, to the very heart of human beings. These two stories with their realistic tenor transcend the bounds of shallow realism.

It is this miraculous transcendence that makes literature and is missing from the majority of the stories in this collection. This is not to say that they are badly written, or that they are not interesting enough. Many of them reveal the pains and pleasures, the trivialities of middle-class existence. D. Kameswari's 'The Cost of Tears' is about a greedy Dr. Sarojini, who comes upon the moment of truth at a melodramatic turn. There is meaningless angst in Butchibabu's 'Shreds of Paper and Shards of Glass' and in Turaga Janaki Rani's 'Pilgrimage', the existential void stares at the reader again. But these stories fail to sound the depths.

There are some stories which could have been dropped from this selection. They include Viswanatha Satyanarayana's 'Three Beggars', Chalam's 'A Flower Blossoms' and Volga's 'Agony'. After reading Chaso's and Padmaraju's stories, Satyanarayana's tale appears to be an exercise in virtuosity by a good poet. Chalam had better stories to write than this lustreless essay in abstract sensuality. Volga too falters because of the sheer abstractness of her narrative.

The meaningful thing to be done with this kind of a selection which spans half a century is a critical evaluation of each of the authors, and the changes that came into story-writing over the decades. What was needed was a separate introduction to each of the decades, and an assessment of the trends that came up during that time. The realism in Telugu stories is a many-hued one. It is ideological, playful, dark, and even trivial. There is a need to do a literary spectrum anlysis, as it were, of these stories. And it would be a rewarding one for anyone who cares to do it. The only caveat is that ideological and theoretical blinkers of any kind would not be of much help in this task.■

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A Rich Harvest

Tapan Basu

SLICE OF LIFE : PUNJABI SHORT FICTION 1901 - 2000
Translations and Introduction by Rana Nayar
Unistar Books, Chandigarh, 2006, pp.204, Rs. 295.00

For a reader uninitiated in the tradition of the short story in the Punjabi language *Slice of Life* offers a rich harvest of examples of writings from within this tradition. The stories selected, translated into English by Rana Nayar, are arranged in chronological order and range across the entire span of the twentieth century.

In his Introduction to this volume, Nayar provides a historical perspective on this range of stories, tracing not only the evolution of the short story tradition in modern Punjab but also its antecedents within the storytelling tradition in India as a whole. The Punjabi short story, accor-ding to him, can be traced back to the medieval forms of *Sakhi* literature and inspiring legends such as *Varaans.* Solidly grounded in history, the short story in Punjabi has been always a vehicle of a deep-rooted impulse towards realistic expression in Punjabi literature. Only during a brief interlude in between did the Punjabi short story adopt another guise—that of the *qissas,* verse renditions of popular lore of love and of faith instigated by the Sufi folk-productions that captured the imagi-nation of Punjab all through the medieval era.

It was not that the earliest exponents (in the modern period) of the short story in Punjabi, such as Charan Singh Shaheed and Giani Heera Singh Dard, necessarily employed the techniques of realism to narrate their tales. In each of the two stories by these two writers in the volume under review, the fabulist mode of narration is utilized freely, but the implications of belief in a supernatural world order which the fabulist elements underscore are interrogated and even debunked. Thus Baba Waryama's project of acquiring a "divine sight" into the past lives of people around him and Rajni's self-prostration before the "miracles" of Pir Galarh Shah are equally ridiculed by their respective authors. The influence of the efforts of the Singh Sabha move-ment to rid the Sikh panth of ritualistic and superstitious practices is writ large on these stories.

Similarly, the influence of anti-colonial ideology marks the story 'The Rebel's Daughter' by Giani Gurmukh Singh Musafir. The pathos generated by conflict between political and personal loyalties lies at the core of the story in which the nationalist parents' sacrifice of a child and the child's development of a nationalist consciousness are the prime focus.

The nationalist struggle is in focus again in Kartar Singh Duggal's 'The Miracle' which brings to the fore the extraordinary energies evoked in ordi-nary people in the course of any heroic enterprise.

Along with Kartar Singh Duggal, Amrita Pritam is one of the few Punjabi writers who have been extensively translated into English and other world languages. Amrita Pritam's 'Thursday Fast' is the fictionalized account of a woman who has taken to prostitution out of dire necessity although she retains her identities as devoted wife and mother while living up to the demands of her 'profession'.

The trials and tribulations of women in gendered societies is the subject also of Ajeet Cour's story 'Moments Hung on the Cross' and of Daljit Kaur Tiwana's story 'A Silent Witch', each dealing with the lives of women who try to survive broken marriages with determination and dignity.

The sensitivity to women's subjectivity as in these stories is complicated by the introduction of a class dimension to the representation of a woman's sufferings in Chandan Negi's 'A Festering Wound'. "The story encapsulates the poignant predicament of a mother who trades her newly-born children simply to keep herself and her disabled husband afloat, and a wife who tries to keep at bay her own crippling desires amidst the growing squalor of daily domestic drudgery.

The final entry in this anthology of short stories is one by Prem Gorkhi which recalls the intense passions, suspicious, jealousies and homicidal hostilities of European naturalist theatre in depicting the rage of a man who fears that he has been cuckolded by his wife. The psychosexual context of this drama is graphically etched out and its resolution in Bishna's sense of remorse at having maltreated his wife results in the much-required catharsis for its readers.

Nayar challenges the thesis of many a chronicler of Punjabi literature that Punjabi literature defines itself by its response to the Partition of India being the reference point for all cultural negotiations of life in the province in the twentieth century. In Nayar's opinion, the twentieth century witnessed in Punjab, apart from the Partition, tumultuous episodes such as the Green Revolution marching hand in hand with the first stirrings of the Naxalite uprising, the battle for the Punjabi suba ending in the bifurcation of Punjab into Punjab and Haryana, and then a long, long plunge into religious fundamentalism and militancy. And all this, he asserts, "has also found an equally vibrant and soul-stirring articulation in the Punjabi literature."

The many facets of life in twentieth century Punjab and the ups and downs in its history find themselves movingly recorded in a *Slice of Life.* ■

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Muted Voices from the Past

M. Mukundan

SEVEN SUMMERS: A MEMOIR
By Mulk Raj Anand
Penguin Books, Delhi, 2005, pp. 240, Rs. 250.00

SELECTED SHORT STORIES
By Mulk Raj Anand
Penguin Books, New Delhi, pp. 262, Rs. 250.00

In a sultry evening in Delhi, here I am, reread-ing Mulk Raj Anand—from time to time kicking in the air to ward off aedes aegypti.

For most of us Indians, the history of reading is in two parts. If you are not educated in a public school, you have to wait until you have learnt enough English to begin reading books in English, while you read—or you are read to—in your mother tongue at a very early age. This was the case in point for me. At a time when there were very few public schools, children of my generation from rural India spoke, read and dreamt in our mother tongues. That is why Mulk Raj Anand could enter my history of reading only belatedly - when I had picked up enough knowledge of the language he wrote in.

Under review are two books by Mulk Raj Anand, *Seven Summers: A Memoir* and *Selected Short Stories*. If the memoir was first published in 1951, some stories included in the collection date back to 1930s. Both are reprinted now to mark the birth centenary of the departed writer. The fact that these works were written half a century ago may alarm the readers. For, for the present-day readers whose literary sensibilities have drastically changed during this period, fifty years seem to be a long period, long enough to render even a good fictional work a mere antiquity. But we know that great writers transcend time and geography, and from what one gathers from this autobiographical oeuvre confirms—to our joy—the fact that Mulk Raj Anand belongs to this rare category of litterateurs whose work, by virtue of universality, humanity and sheer artistry, delete temporal and geographical demarcations.

This reviewer's first choice was the memoir because here Mulk Raj Anand talks about the first seven years of his childhood. Since undoubtedly the biggest loss we adults inherit is our childhood; all books about it—be it Leo Tolstoy's *Childhood* or Marjane Satrapi's *The Story of a Childhood*—have a wide readership and induce publishers like Simon and Schuster to bring out an entire series of childhood biographies of great achievers. Our writers hardly bring themselves to write autobiographies, let alone autobiographies of childhood. Arguably, one reason is the fact that writers of our times think more in terms of their future than their past.

Seven Summers is divided in two parts—*The Road* and *The River*. The first part evokes the small things that make up the author's childhood —his little brothers, kikar trees, birds, flowers, and, invariably, sing-song fairytales and djinns. Nevertheless, what attracts the child Mulk Raj Anad is the road in front of his house, lined with casuarina trees, which stretches from end to end of the horizon. *This road, on which caravans of camels and donkeys and horses and men are always passing, is the first hurdle that must be crossed*, thinks the little boy. For he is no ordinary child: He is going to be one of the finest Indian writers in English. He has very often an urge to cross the road, which is nothing but a metaphor for what lies in the future which he as a writer and as a social activist of some sort should sooner or later cross. Among the many incidents of childhood—as simple as tales—he narrates, there is one in what imagination and memory are inseparable: He and his elder brother Ganesh take their kittens to a well to show them their reflections. *Standing by the low terrace of the well, bending over the projection and holding the kittens out over the water, we saw their moving images. We could hear the echoes of voices from the depths of the well.* Ganesh tricks his younger brother to drop the kitten into the well. This is a disturbingly crafted beautiful passage.

The second part, *The River*, opens with a question Mulk Raj Anand asks his mother—*Where did you find me ? Where did I come from?* Such a question may appear to be banal today. It was put a century ago, though. At that time, no one would have dared ask that sort of a question. Mulk Raj Anand did. Logically, more queries follow: *What are the stars, mother ? How can the sun move all day without feet* ?

In this part of the memoir, we find the protagonist as a curious and alert child growing up asking questions. That he was already a writer in the making is evident. What we read here is the childhood story of a writer who was a child almost hundred years ago. That should have given the reader a sense of remoteness, but it doesn't. Inversely, it makes us read the life-like tales as if they were taking place right now. Yes, good writers of the past live in the present as well with equal intensity.

The second book under review is *Selected Stories* which can be considered as a fictional extension of the memoir. There is not much to say about it as what has been said about the childhood memoir is relevant to this work as well. Reading *Selected Stories* immediately after *Memoir*, and as they blend perfectly, the reader often wonders which one is fiction and which one is not.

It is fortified with an in-depth introduction by Saros Cowasjee of University of Regina. Included in the collection are such classic stories as 'Liar'—Salman Rushdie is fond of it—and 'The Man Who Loved Monkeys More Than Human Beings'. A reviewer's first prerogative is to find fault, at any cost, with the work he is reviewing. This reviewer is no different. True to the spirit of a genuine critic, in my attempt to criticize severely at least some of the stories, I am however disarmed right from the very first pages by Saros Cowasjee who considers these stories *delightful*. The fact that classics are immune to critical scrutiny adds to this reviewer's discomfiture. But are works of great literary merits supposed to delight the readers? Does for that matter J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* or *Elizabeth Costello* delight us ? They are great works because they hurt us and humiliate us.

Although the present-day Indian fiction writers set in general their stories in cities, most of Mulk Raj Anand's stories are set in the countryside and so they have a rural flavour about them. Mulk Raj Anand is at his narrative best when he describes rural life. In spite of the fact that the author lived for a long time in Delhi, the Bombay and the Delhi of his writings lack the surging energy and unsettling chaos that were hallmarks of our big cities even half a century ago. Like Bernard Malamud's stories, Mulk Raj Anand's tales are deftly crafted with a clearly demarcated beginning and denouement.

Although the narratives and the landscapes of his stories have something in common with no exception, Mulk Raj Anand deals with a variety of themes in his stories. For instance, look at 'Lullaby'. *The engine chuk-chuked; the leather belt khupp-khupped; the bolts jig-jigged; the plugs tik-tikked* ... A *delightful* story, indeed, that puts not only babies but even grown-ups to sleep.

Do we writers write keeping in mind our readers ? Do we write the way they—the readers—would want us to write ? Most do not. But I am afraid Mulk Raj Anand had in his mind what sort of readers he was writing for. What else does the following passage from 'The Maharaja and the Tortoise' imply ? *There is a sacred belief in India in a system of government called the Ram Raj.*

While going through this collection we wonder how the art of writing has evolved over the years. If, for Mulk Raj Anand, the road and the river are two separate entities, for Ben Okri, author of *The Famished Road*, the river flows just beneath the road. Imagination is central to the fictional writings of our time, to the point that it attempts, at times, to dislodge even heroes and heroines in order to take their place in the story. An Arundhati Roy or an Anita Nair have taken our fiction to a bewildering world of imagination and creative power. And yet, amidst the global celebration of our fictional pursuits, even today we find Mulk Raj Anand's muted stories written more than half a century ago *delightful*. ■

M. Mukundan, a well known writer, writes in Malayalam and English.

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A Year in the Life of Mohini

Shyamala A. Narayan

BRAHMA'S DREAM: A NOVEL
By Shree Ghatage
IndiaInk, an imprint of Roli Books, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 436, Rs. 495.00

Shree Ghatage (born 1957) moved to Canada in the nineteen-eighties; her first book, *Awake When All the World is Asleep* (1997) is a collection of short stories. *Brahma's Dream* (first published in Canada in 2004) is an unusual coming-of-age story, because the heroine grows up in the shadow of a life-threatening disease. The novel raises philosophical questions about man's fate, but at the same time gives a realistic picture of members of a Chitpavan Brahmin family living in Shivaji Park in suburban Bombay in the nineteen-forties.

The novel, narrated in the third person, deals with one year in the life of Mohini, the daughter of Keshav and Kamala Oek, born in 1934. It begins when Mohini is twelve years old; earlier events are presented as flashbacks. When she is five months old, she is diagnosed as suffering from an incurable disease. A patient needs frequent blood transfusions to survive. Ghatage uses simple prose, which draws no attention to itself:

> He informed them that she suffered from a hereditary congenital blood disease called Cooley's Anaemia. There was silence in the room. They looked at him without comprehension. "What that means,' Dr Merchant said, "is that her body does not produce enough haemoglobin." . . . "The longevity of the patient is anywhere up to three years. . . . Sometimes, in rare cases, it can be slightly longer" (p.23).

The courage with which the joint family rallies to face this situation is inspiring. When she is five years old, her grandfather, Vishnupant, relinquishes his position as professor of history at the university, ostensibly to write a definitive tome entitled *India After 1920.* "Those around him suspected that he wanted to spend more time with Mohini, who had lived longer than anyone had dared hope."

Ghatage presents the pain of a young mother, and her determination to do the best for her child. When Kamala asks her husband Keshav to translate into Marathi the notes written by Dr Chitnis about Mohini's condition, he offers to teach her English instead; the way she makes the time to learn to read and write English is a wonderful expression of maternal love. Her character is also revealed in the way she is strict with Mohini:

You want to know why I am strict with Mohini?" Kamala said. "Because, if I allow her leeway on account of her illness, if I allow her to make her abnormal health an excuse for bad behaviour, then it will not be long before she will lose respect for herself and slide into self pity. And if that happened I would never forgive myself. She is only a child and it is up to me to make sure that I bring her up in such a way as to allow her to grow up with dignity and character" (p. 320).

Young Mohini is very intelligent, and grows up "with dignity and character". She is mature far beyond her years. Because her bones become weak, she has to spend a lot of time resting in bed, and cannot play and run around like other children. She becomes very sensitive to social issues, such as the ill-treatment meted out to widows. Her aunt Vasanti becomes a widow just two years after marriage, when her husband goes to England and does not return; her father-in-law promptly throws her out of the marital home in Nagpur, and Vishnupant brings her back to Bombay. The Oeks are a liberal family, and we can see the slow change in attitudes towards widowhood: whereas the widow Bayabai, of the older generation, wears only a dull sari and shaves her head, Vasanti wears ordinary clothes, and keeps her hair (though she cannot wear flowers or participate in any social functions). Orthodox segments of their society disapprove of his attitude. Vishnupant and the younger generation are also more liberal when it comes to issues of caste—Bayabai does not like to make tea for Keshav's non-Brahmin colleagues, but he persists in bringing them home. Mohini also gains an insight into wider social issues, like the relationship between the ruling British and the Indians: "It occurred to Mohini that she had not met a single British person even though they had ruled India for over a hundred years. She had, however, met an American" (p. 104).

Ghatage writes in a very accessible idiom. She does not employ too many Indian words, though she uses terms from Marathi for relationships

She has "heard of British-only clubs and outside which were hung signs that read, Indians and Dogs Not Allowed" (p. 107) unique position as an observer rather tha participant makes her more sensitive to th historical events like the freedom struggle assassination of Mahatma Gandhi affect t of the individual. We get a new perspectiv the reaction in Maharashtra following the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi—the Chitpavan Brahmin community is targete unruly mobs because Nathuram Godse w Chitpavan Brahmin.

Vishnupant invites thirteen-year-old Mohini to join in their discussion when s students come to Koleshwar Nivas. It is th that Mohini hears about the horrors of Partition; a student suggests that people " and convince themselves that everything i illusion, a dream." Mohini asks her grand "If all this is Brahma's dream, then why is having such nightmares?" (p. 102). This le to a long discussion in the family about p and suffering, about fate and free will. Th young widow Vasanti, full of "sorrow and at the irretrievable loss of her own unfulfi dreams", points out that old Vishnupant " really did answer Mohini's question" (p. 1 The remarkable thing is that Mohini thin primarily of the problems of others when mentions Brahma's nightmares, she is not obsessed with her own medical condition.

Ghatage writes in a very accessible idio She does not employ too many Indian wo though she uses terms from Marathi for relationships ("Kamalavahini", "Vishnuka "Aai") or articles of clothing ("parkar-pol "dhotar") or food ("khadi sakhar", "chana "coconut karanji"). At a few places, the de do not sound quite right: "Vasanti would wearing a five-yard sari. Mohini was glad. nine-yard saris were old-fashioned" (p. 31

The commonly worn saris are six yards (not five) and the Maharashtrian sari is eig yards, not nine yards, in length. At anothe place, she gets a date wrong "It seems ther no wedding halls to be had in Shivaji Park for the fourth of January which Guruji has picked as an auspicious day" (p. 286). Hin communities all over India avoid the perio December 15 to January 13 for marriages, which are held only after January 14, Mak Sankranti.

However, these are minor details, which make no difference to the larger pattern. *Brahma's Dream* is valuable not for its phil sophical discussions or its picture of society for its central character. The novel gives vivid, yet inspiring, picture of the pain of young girl, as she confronts various medic problems.■

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